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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Hale Ritchie. I was born and raised and still live in Wichita. I'm the retired CEO of Ritchie Companies, a construction paving and materials business, which at its peak employed approximately 750 Kansans. As a lifelong Kansan, I'm still interested in the same types of issues that concerned myself and my employees for many years. I have watched the current financial concerns with a great deal of frustration, as I'm sure you have as well. In my opinion, it all started with a huge mistake and has progressed from there. The 2012 tax law was devised with good intent. It was to bring jobs and prosperity to Kansans'. In retrospect, it was too much, too quickly. It turned the "trickle down" theory into a Noah's Arc type flood! It has not produced what was promised, and it is bankrupting the State.

So, how are we fixing it. We seem to be fixing it by taking money from other programs, such as the highway funds and the retirement funds. We are looking for some onetime infusions of cash by selling off our accounts receivable, or we may turn the tobacco money cash flow stream into a onetime shot of cash. In other words, we're looking for any short term fix to a long term problem. We're sticking our finger in the dyke, over and over, and fixing nothing. My view is that we are doing all this so we don't have to admit we made a mistake on the front end. Well..... We did make a mistake and we need to fix it!

The proposal to eliminate the business exemption is a step in the right direction. Nobody wants to raise taxes, and I'm confident that the businesses affected will be in here fighting to stop it. But let's remember that it was those same businesses getting it in the first place that has caused a lot of this current crisis. So to keep from putting it back like it was should we take funds from the needy, the retirees, our bridges and roads, special needs people? It makes more sense to me to take it from those we gave it to in the first place. I repeat..... it was a mistake! I think the businesses who will fight against this would also prefer that the State not go bankrupt instead.

I agree the tax structure of the state needs work and needs to encourage business. However, the way we did it failed and is taking the State down with it. We need to back up, take a breath, get the State back on a firm financial footing, then have a new conversation as to how to proceed. We made a mistake.....let's admit it, so we can move on with our heads above water. It will take strong leadership to turn this ship around and I'm hoping you will provide it.

Thanks for your consideration.