

Tom Brungardt, Member
Geary County USD 475 Board of Education

Testimony before the Senate Standing Committee on Elections and Ethics

SB 171 (Opposition)

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak before you in opposition to moving elections of local boards of education to November of even numbered years and making those elections partisan.

My Board has passed a resolution opposing those provision and I am here representing my Board.

Let me first speak to the idea of making the elections partisan. As far as I know, elections for Boards of Education in Kansas have always been non-partisan. By these elections we have elected quality board members throughout the years. These board members have helped create a very successful system of public school education. As board members elected on a non-partisan basis we don't look to the platform of either party to guide our thinking. We are motivated by what we believe is best for the students in our communities.

There may be a reason to elect members of the legislature on a partisan basis, since the legislature is organized along those lines. School boards are not and should not be. There is no reason members of my board should be divided between Republican and Democrat. In that way lies partisan bickering, not concerted action based on the best interest of children.

There is another problem that I see. Here I must admit to not seeing a solution to this in fifty-four page bill, although it may be there somewhere. I'm not sure how partisan elections work when all members of the Board are elected at-large. Members are not running against each other. Unlike other electoral contests, we are not attempting to vanquish another candidate.

Next let me speak to the proposal to move elections to November of even numbered years. We believe this would reduce the focus on school board candidates as they compete for attention with all other candidates for every federal, state, and local office. I'm sure you are all familiar with the term "ballot fatigue." The lower your office is on the ballot, the less likely voters will get around to voting in that race.

Moving elections to November would mean either a very long period between elections and taking office in June, or as this bill proposes, moving the date of assuming office to January. Board of Education are unique among government bodies in that their terms coincide with what has been a traditional school year. We believe maintaining this arrangement, which also coincides with a fiscal year, is best for the efficient operation of the school district and best for our students.

Once again, on behalf of Geary County USD 475 Board of Education, I urge the committee to oppose **SB 171** and I'd be glad to stand for questions.