

Committee Members,

My name is Wes Bainter, Sheridan County Commissioner, businessman in Hoxie and involved in housing in many communities in Western Kansas. I am a newly elected county commissioner last year so I have now completed my first year as a county commissioner. I decided to serve in this position because I am fed up with the unreasonable and unfair valuations on property all across our state. Here in Sheridan county as well as many counties in Western Kansas, we are agricultural areas depending almost solely on agricultural products. As you all know, agricultural commodity prices are very low and have been for several years which doesn't support valuation increases year after year. In my position as commissioner I fully understand that it is the responsibility of the commissioners to levy taxes and reduce mill levies regardless of valuation increases. Its important to realize that in most cases county commissioners have many family and friendships in their county that makes it very difficult or impossible to hold the line on taxes and work in the best interest of the complete county populace.

The Western Kansas counties need the leadership of our Kansas legislature. I fully and completely support K.A.S. 79-1460; " THE VALUATION FOR ALL REAL PROPERTY SHALL NOT BE INCREASED SOLELY AS THE RESULT OF NORMAL REPAIR, REPLACEMENT OR MAINTENANCE OF EXISTING STRUCTURES, EQUIPMENT OR IMPROVEMENT OF THE PROPERTY". The evidence is overwhelming! Just take a drive through any of our rural Kansas towns and notice the abundance of older dilapidated homes in great need of repair. The owners of these homes are already paying outrageous property taxes and don't make upgrades to these homes because just as soon as they do the county appraiser is coming by with his camera to document the upgrade and makes the determination that the property is now worth more and the valuation just went up so now property tax on this property just went up! Our rural Kansas towns are looking terrible because of all the older homes in very bad need of repairs. This is only one example of the affect and the result of ridiculously high property taxes. Normal repair and maintenance to homes would include the replacement of exterior doors and windows, the replacement of roofing underlayment and installation new shingles, the repair of the exterior wall and installation of new siding, new trim work around the exterior with chalking and painting, the replacement of concrete or wood steps and porch necessary to enter the house, new water heater, new HVAC heat and air system, upgrade electrical and plumbing systems to work properly and be safe for the residence. This to name and describe the main items that usually need repair with older homes.

I did some research in several of our Western Kansas county seat towns and as a very conservative estimate of this problem, I found from 40 to 60 of these older homes in each of these county seat towns very badly need to be repaired. In the previous 10 years before I became a Sheridan County commissioner, the property taxes here in Sheridan county have doubled! And in some instances in residential and commercial properties the increase has been 300 percent. We used to think that the county seat towns were always going to thrive and grow. I'm here to tell you that the county seat towns are declining, populations are declining, school enrollment is declining and the average age is getting older. We are not attracting and retaining the younger people, we are not attracting new business and we are not creating new jobs. All of these conditions are the result of out of control and extremely high property taxes. Here in Sheridan county we have done this to ourselves. If property taxes here in Sheridan county double again in the next ten years we won't have anything left to work with. The counties in Kansas need legislation from the Kansas legislature that helps counties restrain the growth of taxes and promote economic growth and expansion. There is NO way we can tax ourselves into prosperity! We are in fact taxing ourselves into extinction.

Thanks for receiving my testimony. WES BAINTEr, Sheridan County Commissioner, HOXIE, KANSAS