

Testimony Supporting SB 316

by Karl Peterjohn

Voter empowerment is needed in Kansas. SB 316 would significantly empower Kansas voters and should be a must pass bill for the 2016 Kansas legislature.

The lack of this type of legislation is one major reason why this state has lagged behind its neighbors in economic development. Three of the four state surrounding Kansas have constitutional or statutory requirements for voter approval of property tax hikes. The business risk and fiscal uncertainty of rising taxes in general, and property taxes in particular, are already lower in these surrounding states because of these measures. Kansas needs to make progress, or risk falling even further behind.

It is time that Kansas caught up with our neighbors. SB 316 is a significant step, albeit one that does not go as far as I would like it to go, in bring article 2 of the Kansas Constitution's Bill of Rights that says, "all political power in this state is inherent in the people,..." to life by requiring property tax hikes by cities and counties would also receive voter approval the way that all local sales tax hikes must receive voter approval before being enacted today.

I agree with my colleagues, Commissioner Howell's comments and urge this committee to modify SB 316 to make it workable with mail ballots in the near future and further changes so that city and county property tax hike proposals can appear on election ballots in 2017 and beyond, the way that local sales tax hikes do today.

As a historical footnote for this committee, I must add that I have repeatedly testified in support of legislation like SB 316 in front of both the Kansas senate and house tax committees going well back into the last century. Back then, I pointed out that our neighboring states had a few year head start on improving their property tax fiscal climate using voter empowerment. Today, our neighboring states have enjoyed a few decades head start on improving their property tax climate over Kansas by empowering their voters. I also tried to defend the property tax lid that was repealed in the 1990's as well as efforts by the cities and counties to add exceptions to the statutory property tax lid of that era.

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