

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE ELECTIONS COMMITTEE REGARDING HB 2271

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2013, 1:30 P.M.

SARA CAYLOR, CITY OF OTTAWA CITY COMMISSIONER

Honorable committee members and staff, I am Sara Caylor, Ottawa City Commissioner, and am appearing in opposition to HB 2271. I am currently halfway through my first four (4) year term as a City Commissioner and want to speak to you today from the perspective of a younger person in local government and as a member of a generation that is, in large part, turned off by today's partisan politics at the federal and state level. I am opposed to HB 2271 for the following reasons:

1. The current structure works for local communities and I am not convinced that there has been enough empirical evidence submitted that justifies making such a drastic change to local elections especially forcing them into a partisan requirement. We have seen major companies make substantial changes before they had a clear understanding of the implication upon their customers and take corrective action when those changes create a marketing nightmare. Coca-Cola, with their failed introduction of their new Coke and Ford Motor Company, with their Edsel model, are but two classic examples of making major changes without fully appreciating the impact upon their customers. HB 2271 is a drastic change for local citizens and there is no evidence to suggest the positives outweigh the negatives.
2. Not every citizen embraces partisan politics-my generation certainly does not as evidenced by our participation in government at all levels. I would suggest that it is more important for my generation to select local officials that work together for common solutions rather than espouse a particular party platform. If local governments are moved to November and partisan elections, I would suggest that participation will decrease, frustration will increase for local citizens and local elections will become lost in the mix. In my time as City Commissioner, I have found that it is far less important to the citizens I serve as to whether or not I have an R or D after my name but that it is all about our actions and responding to the needs of the entire community.

3. In my short time as a City Commissioner, I find that many citizens are confused as which level of government represents them and where they turn to for help with their issues. I would suggest that the change to partisan municipal elections, in November, will serve to exacerbate that confusion even more and create even higher credibility and frustration issues citizens have with their government representatives.

4. Local government-City Commissions, School Boards, other units of government-are often the entry level for those wanting to serve in local government. They are attracted by the non-partisan approach and not having to be part of a highly charged November ballot process at the federal and state levels. It is an opportunity for our local citizens to learn about service for an entire community not based upon major campaign contributions, outside influence or highly charged partisan positions which, regardless of the party, are not focused on solving local issues with local cooperation and collaboration. If this change is made, I would speculate that it will make good local residents who wish to serve their communities even more reluctant to be part of a system that is viewed as dysfunctional.

As Commissioner Ramsey has testified, this is an idea whose time has not come and should be dropped from consideration. I would also echo his thoughts that local governments should be seen as partners with the state that work together to increase voter participation. Working together in a legitimate partnership, I can assure you we can find solutions to voter apathy.

Thank you for listening to me today as I have testified on behalf of the Ottawa City Commission in opposition to HB 2271. I might also point out that today you have heard from the youngest and oldest members of the Ottawa City Commission-not as people affiliated with a political party but as local government representatives that want to do the best we can do to serve our citizens effectively. Your time and courtesy have been appreciated. If you have questions or comments on any aspect of this testimony, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you.

Sara Caylor, City Commissioner
City of Ottawa, Kansas