February 6, 2018

The Honorable Julia Lynn, Chairperson, and members of the Senate Committee on Commerce:

Starting in 2014, the rural areas of the state of Kansas began experiencing a downturn in their local economies. The reason as to why this occurred is a direct correlation to the decline in commodities in the agricultural sector and the steep decline in the price of oil. Many local economies in Central and Western Kansas depend on one or both of these industries.
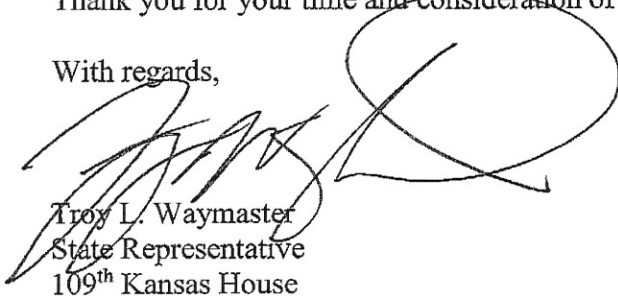
My hometown is one of those communities that rely on both industries. Russell, Kansas, has an agricultural and oil driven economy. I can recall in the late 1980's, that businesses closed, and people moved away due to low agricultural and oil prices, very similar to today. While in school, we would wonder who would return after the summer break. In 1980, the population of the county of Russell was nearing 9,000, however, today that population is about 6,500.

When I attended the Council of State Governments conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, I also served as a member of the Agriculture and Economic Development committee. At the conference, we were presented with a rural economic development tool that would be a great addition to the economic development packages here in the state of Kansas. These economic ideas are evident in the Ad Astra Rural Jobs Act. This economic development tool is designed to attract investment firms that invest in companies that will expand, relocate, and/or build in designated rural areas of the state.

Rural areas of our state are in dire need of diversifying their economies, however, the current programs offered by the Kansas Department of Commerce provide very little to rural communities. The Ad Astra Rural Jobs Act is specifically targeted to address the economic needs of rural Kansas.

Thank you for your time and consideration of House Bill 2168: The Ad Astra Rural Jobs Act.

With regards,

Troy L. Waymaster
State Representative
109th Kansas House

Senate Commerce Committee
Date: 2-6-18
Attachment: 1

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