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TOPEKA

SENATE CHAMBER

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JOINT COMMITTEE ON STATE BUILDING  
CONSTRUCTION  
JOINT COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE BUDGET

March 12, 2019

Re: SB7 on “Timing of Officer Elections for Local School Boards”

Chair Sutton, Vice Chair Carpenter, Ranking Member Parker and members of the House Elections Committee, it my honor to present what I hope is a simple bill that fixes the unintended consequence of the Local Election Bill, HB2104, which the legislature passed in 2015.

In that bill and the conference committee report, local school board elections were changed from the traditional spring dates to the fall dates of odd-numbered years. Under previous law, even though there was a relatively long lag time from the spring election until the July meeting when new board members took office, the officers of President and Vice President were elected at that first meeting.

Under the current law, the lag time extends from the early November election of new board members, with the taking of office in early January, BUT the officer election, by statute, does not occur until the early July board meeting. The change created a lag time of eight (8) months between the November election of new school board members and the internal election of school board officers in July.

A similar comparison can be made if we use the same procedure and lag time in the selection of the officers of our Senate Chamber. Imagine that after our November election for new Senate members, we came back in January and kept the previous Senate President and Vice President for the next session, potentially with a much different composition in the Senate.

I would like to share some brief history on how I became involved in this bill draft and the interesting process of “sausage making” each of us as Senators often encounter. One of my school board members met with me and our House Representative this summer to request that we introduce a bill to fix this “simple problem” caused by the timing of elections. I contacted the Revisor and a bill was drafted. I then presented the bill to the Manhattan board of education during our annual legislative meeting. In that discussion, I discovered that some board members actually liked the later officer election date. I proceeded to ask if KASB had a position on this “problem” of the long lag time and discovered that there were mixed opinions among that group. You do have to love “DEMOCRACY”!

After subsequent visits with some KASB staff and members, our common ground solution was to allow each board to set its date for officer election up to the July deadline. As a long-time proponent of “local control”, this seems to be a common-sense solution to what was an initial oversight in the drafting of the original ten or so bills (dating back as far as 2010) that dealt with changing local elections.

It is my hope that this bill which allows local control will pass this committee and both houses of the legislature. It is my own expectation that most boards will want to move election of school board officers up to a time earlier in the current eight (8) month lag from the November election.

There are some other minor wording changes in this draft. I support those clarifications as well as the core of the bill.

Finally, I became aware of another amendment to this bill that I view as “friendly.” It gives an option to change the method of election, voting plan of school boards, that returns to the previous law not requiring a special election to accomplish that change.

I will joyfully stand for questions at the appropriate time, Mr. Chair.