

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill No. 155,
House Standing Committee on Education
From: Gary Beachner

March 1, 2012
9:00am – Room 784-DSOB

Committee Chair-Representative Aurand, Vice Chair-Representative Huebert, and members of the House Standing Committee on Education; I am Gary Beachner from Parsons, Kansas. From Parsons, I run our family grain elevator business. We also farm, raise cattle, and operate a commercial feedyard. I served 2 terms on the USD 503 Parsons School Board, and serve on the board of directors for the Great Plains Development Authority. But today I testify in support of SB 155 as a private citizen of Parsons, Labette County Kansas.

The need for SB 155:

History: In 1940, the US Government condemned over 13,700 acres of property near Parsons, Kansas in Labette County to form what later became known as the Kansas Army Ammunition Plant (KSAAP), to produce munitions for the inevitable entry of the US into World War II. **None of this property was ever within the boundaries of any of the four school districts in Labette County.** The property has been fenced and under high security ever since. A vast majority of the citizens of Labette County have never been allowed access.

In 2005 the KSAAP was placed on the Army's 'Base Realignment and Closure' (BRAC) list. This was devastating news to the county. Fortunately for our citizens, the Labette County commission had the foresight to be proactive, and created an opportunity to work with the Army to develop a plan to acquire a large portion of this property. This agreement ensures the property will be remediated, redeveloped, and returned to productive use. This bold action has been taken with perhaps great risk to the county, but there is also opportunity for great rewards for the county. It may be decades before we know for sure. **None of this property had been on the property tax roles for over 70 years.**

The Great Plains Development Authority (GPDA) was formed to guide the safe remediation, and the redevelopment of this property, in the best interest of the citizens of Labette County. Much of the property can immediately be put into productive use, but some must be carefully remediated, then made available for approved, appropriate uses. The nine member board of directors of the GPDA, which are appointed by the county commission to

3 year staggered terms, have employed a professional staff to manage and direct this mission.

This is a county effort; the whole county shares the risk of failure; most county residents believe the whole county should share in the rewards of success. SB 155 allows all of the school districts in Labette County to share in the future success of the privatization and redevelopment of this “new found property”. SB 155 provides for fair and equitable distribution of state aid, and the levying of school taxes, for all four of the school districts in Labette County: USD 503, USD 504, USD 505, & USD 506. The proposed formula for distribution is equitable, it is transparent, and cannot be manipulated.

The idea to introduce SB 155 was taken from previous legislative actions, which shared revenues from the potential development of racetrack gaming facilities or lottery gaming facilities with county school districts in Cherokee County, and another which shared revenues from the potential development of property used in production of ethanol with county school districts in Haskell County.

If rural communities in Kansas can find ways to work together to develop and promote the growth opportunities available in their regions, everyone benefits. A rising tide lifts all boats. Sometimes a little encouragement from afar helps us recognize a high tide.

SB 155 has no fiscal effect on the State of Kansas. SB 155 does not raise taxes. I urge this committee to approve SB 155.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and would be happy to answer any questions at the appropriate time.

Thank You