

**Kansas House Of Representatives' Local Government Committee
Testimony of Mary M. Thomas, Shawnee County Commissioner and Richard Eckert,
Shawnee County Counselor In Opposition To HB 2190**

HB 2190 as currently drafted provides two methods for imposing term limits on county commissioners:

1. A board of county commissioners may pass a resolution imposing term limits.
2. The question of term limits for county commissioners may be placed on the ballot after receipt of a petition signed by 5% of county voters.

Shawnee County is opposed to HB 2190 for the following reasons:

1. **Term limits limit voter choices.** One of the principal arguments in favor of term limits is they allow the public to have a choice of new people with “fresh ideas” to represent them. Shawnee County believes that the only real limitation is one that is placed on the voter. Term limits are a completely indiscriminate and arbitrary means of choosing who may serve in public office. Limits don't just eliminate the “bad” elected officials, they ensure the elimination the “good” ones as well.
2. **Term limits result in lost efficiency.** Term limits for county commissioners would remove from office people who have extensive experience in making county government operate efficiently. The County Commission will become less efficient--at least for a while--as newcomers become familiar with duties and processes. The newcomers also are faced with the task of getting acquainted with the many key officials and employees who enable government bodies to function efficiently.
3. **Term limits result in lost knowledge.** Arbitrary term limits insure that Counties will routinely lose the substantive knowledge of veteran commissioners. Many county commissioners develop expertise in certain subject areas or special skills in dealing with other municipalities, such as cities. Although the new officeholders may bring good ideas and good intentions, it may take a long time for the officeholders to acquire a deep understanding of various policy issues and personalities they must deal with in order to effectively govern.
4. **Term limits shift decision making away from elected officials.** Newcomers tend to defer to non-elected staff to help them make decisions. These limitations serve to empower existing staff at the expense of the voters. Professional elected representatives with years of experience are an important check and balance in the system.

U.S. Rep. Henry J. Hyde, then chairman of the House Judiciary Committee when they were considering term limits probably had the best quote concerning term limits:

"If someone told you on election day you had to vote for a certain candidate, you would wonder if you were back in the Soviet Union! But if someone tells you may not vote for a certain candidate because he's overqualified, what is the essential difference? Your range of choice has been limited -- and your

fundamental right as a free American to freely elect whom you want to represent
you has been abridged –

In conclusion, Shawnee County believes that term limits for County Commissioners will limit voters' choices, destroy knowledge and efficiency and shift decision making away from those most responsive to the electorate. Passage of HB 2190 will send a message that the Legislature believes that the public is unqualified to decide for themselves who will represent them.

**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
SHAWNEE COUNTY, KANSAS**

Mary M. Thomas, Vice-Chair

Richard V. Eckert
Shawnee County Counselor