

Chairman Kelly, Vice-Chairman Hoheisel, and Members of the Committee:

An important aspect with the passing of HB 2398 would be the local management and oversight of funds that would flow first, and immediately, to Hesston as part of the pilot program, but ultimately to other rural Kansas communities within the defined Economic Growth Zones (EGZs), which patterns the counties identified within the Kansas Rural Opportunity Zones.

A 2019 KS Department of Commerce Report about the Kansas Rural Opportunity Zones Program noted several times that “solutions are best when they come from rural communities. Residents know best what can make their town better and what it means to prosper”.

As a lifelong Kansan and Hesston native, I have served as the chairman of the board for the Hesston Community Foundation. I concur with the position of the Commerce Department report and recognize three keys to successfully deploying funds locally to maximize the benefit to our community.

Leadership – The Hesston Community Foundation was established in 2008 with a generous founding contribution from Brad Heppner. The board is made up of passionate, local leaders that help set guiding vision and oversight for the entrusted funds of the foundation and how they can help meet the needs of the community.

Insight – It is vital to understand the needs of the local community. As the foundation board chair, I met with other community leaders of the schools, retirement community, senior center, and the City of Hesston to learn what opportunities and challenges exist and what it would take to meet them.

Execution - The foundation continues to grow and contribute to many worthwhile programs with grants that reach across the Hesston area and leave a positive mark on our students, senior citizens, child care center, parks, recreation, and more. There are many examples where grants have helped Hesston and the area to be a place where people want to live, raise their families, and retire. Engagement from the greater Hesston community also helps it thrive...and whether it is a \$10/month donation from a local teacher or a \$1000 donation from a Hesston High alum living in Chicago, the Hesston Community Foundation has the responsibility to manage the funds for the greater good.

In my role as foundation chair, I also engaged with other foundations in Harvey County and beyond who share the same passion for community improvement through effective leadership, insight, and execution.

Passage of this bill would, over the years, provide funds throughout the state for the benefit of many rural communities and Kansas citizens. For that reason, I urge you support this exciting, innovative bill.

Sincerely,



Keith R. Martens