

STATE OF KANSAS  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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DOUG BLEX  
12TH DISTRICT

Mr. Chairman and members of the Water and Environment Committee:

Thank you for allowing the privilege of supporting HB 2686, allowing for the creation a department of water and environment within the executive4 branch of government. If you will permit me to give a brief history of my background in areas of water and conservation. I have worked for 28 years for Kansas Wildlife and Parks, in that capacity I dealt with a lot of water-related issues, 404 permits with US Army Corps of Engineers, dam and wetland construction permits with Division of Water Resources and well as stream related buffers. I served as chairman of the local conservation district for 9 years. I fully understand the importance of local grassroots conservation districts implementing and providing funds for local projects in 105 counties. I served as chairman of the local Regional Advisory Water Committee during the many grassroot public meetings to identify water issues and future needs in both quantity and quality. I served as a private contractor working with Watershed and Protection Strategy, a KDHE administered program to reduce phosphorus and sediment issues on rivers in southeastern Kansas. I apologize for telling you more than you need to know, but I want you to know I have tried working piecemeal with all the individual agencies and it has been very difficult to prioritize water issues across several different agencies. I personally believe a central authority, such as Secretary of Water and Environment would be an asset to bring all different divisions within different agencies under one umbrella. What happens is that Division of Conservation, Kansas Department of Agriculture plans and funds streambank stabilization projects and KDHE will be responsible for funding riparian buffers. Directors from different state agencies with different missions will each take a “slice of the money pie” and the overall benefit gets diluted. One project gets done and the other may not.

There are many parts of HB 2686 that I have concerns with. I support limited government and do no care for so many moving parts. That said I do believe that our water resource is the most precious asset we have in Kansas, from the sediment issues in our eastern Kansas reservoirs to the depletion of groundwater aquifers in western Kansas. Our way of life and economic lifeblood is at stake. Water is our economic “gold”. The recruitment of businesses is critical to a reliable water supply. HB 2686 increases wholesale water prices at a significant percentage increase, but we have been accustomed to cheap water.

I am asking you to make this bill better, but unless we elevate Water and Environment to cabinet level status, WATER WILL NOT BE A PRIORITY IN KANSAS.

Respectfully yours,

Doug Blex

State Representative, House District 12