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Thur. March 10

KASB Communications Editor Scott Rothschild, written opponent testimony before the Senate Committee on Assessment and Taxation on SCR 1620 — A PROPOSITION to amend article 11 of the constitution of the state of Kansas by adding a new section thereto; requiring a supermajority for passage of certain bills for new or increased state taxes.

Madam Chair, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for allowing us to testify on this proposed constitutional amendment. KASB opposes this amendment because it believes this change in public policy would make it more difficult for Kansas students to access a quality public school education, thus harming Kansans and the state for years to come. Our position is guided by members of local school boards across the state.

Requiring a supermajority rule would make it more difficult to get rid of outdated or unfair tax breaks and more difficult to increase taxes. Without sufficient tax revenue, it would be impossible for the Legislature to fulfill its constitutional duty to fund schools at an adequate and equitable level, to provide what the constitution calls for — suitable finance for intellectual, educational, vocational and scientific improvement. The inability to increase taxes on the state level would also put pressure on local governmental entities to increase taxes, especially property taxes. Supermajority requirements may force legislators to raise fees and other revenues often to the detriment of low-income people.

Within the past 20 years, Kansas has weathered several economic downturns, including the Great Recession, an unprecedented health emergency, and policy choices that have crippled the state budget. If history has taught us anything, it is that state government must be nimble enough to be able to adjust to economic conditions and disasters to provide the services that Kansans need. A supermajority rule for tax increases would put a policy straitjacket on Kansas' ability to adjust and could harm education, social services and infrastructure funding for generations. The logical conclusion of such an amendment is to limit the collection of taxes long-term and that would affect education.

A 2020 article in Forbes magazine also noted that credit rating agencies usually force supermajority states to pay higher interest rates on bonds for capital improvements and may result in credit downgrades.

Some legislators may argue they are simply advancing this proposed constitutional amendment to allow voters to make the decision on whether this is a good idea. But the constitution calls on our elected representatives, who know the most about the inner workings of the state budget, to make the decisions on whether to raise or cut taxes to operate our state budget.

The current system has worked well. Through the years, the Kansas Legislature has been able to cut taxes and raise taxes to adjust to the needs of our citizens. There is no need to change that system.