

Kansas Senate Utilities Committee
WRITTEN TESTIMONY in SUPPORT of SB 478
Submitted by Shirley Estrada
March 7, 2022

Chairman Mike Thompson and Members of the Committee:

My name is Shirley Estrada, a private citizen of Neosho County, Kansas.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit this written testimony in support of SB 478, which I believe is needed in order to take back our rural night skies from the blight inflicted by the red flashing lights of nearly 4,000 turbines in this state.

“Apex will...actively engage to better develop our project and become a good neighbor.”

These are the words of Apex Clean Energy in one of their “Get the Facts” mailers in promoting their project, Neosho Ridge Wind. But what are the makings of a “good neighbor”? It certainly can’t be that of covering one-fourth of a county with 139 turbines equipped with red flashing lights—no, make that 278 flashing lights (each turbine is equipped with 2 lights)--as soon as dusk begins and continues all night, every night.

The subject of a light-mitigating technology system was brought up on several occasions during the 9-month discussion-making period before agreements were approved by our county commissioners. Those agreements did not include such as a system, only what was minimally required by the FAA, which was duly noted by “concerned citizens”. However, the issued was raised again before the first turbine was erected, but was dismissed by county commissioners as “let’s wait until the project is finished to see how it looks”.

Unfortunately, the red lights on the Neosho Ridge Wind project look even more atrocious than one could have envisioned. The turbines are divided into multiple circuits, flashing at different intervals and at different sequences. However, those viewing the project from afar may view these various sequences as being more of a unified “synchronization” than those living closer to the project, which makes the description of the flashing lights difficult until one is able to view first hand and from different vantage points.

The visual effects of the red flashing lights are not limited to those who live within the footprint of the Neosho Ridge Wind project—they extend to those living within the entire county—some affected more than others—and beyond to those outside of the county. Due to the height and varying elevations, vantage points in neighboring Labette County see a 10-mile “line” of red flashing lights, through no decision of their own. They can also be seen in Montgomery, Allen, Bourbon, and Crawford, to name a few. Currently, Neosho can see lights on projects built in Allen, Bourbon and Crawford counties.

Once the Neosho Ridge Wind project was far along enough to realize how far-reaching the red blinking lights were at night, our county commissioners agreed to the formation of a committee to research and

engage the efforts of Liberty Utilities, as they had purchased an interest in Neosho Ridge Wind as the operator. While there have been no definite proposals, tentative figures have been received as to the cost to retrofit the turbines with a light-mitigating technology system. One company estimated it would cost \$1M - \$1.5 Million to retrofit, with approximately \$20,000-\$30,000 annually for a maintenance agreement. Another estimate was \$2.3 Million, but that also included the cost of a third-party engineering firm to oversee the project.

No doubt the wind industry argument against SB 478 is that this added equipment will be “too expensive”. For arguments sake, let’s assume the cost to install a light-mitigating technology system on the 139-turbine Neosho Ridge Wind project is a generous \$2.5 Million (\$1.5 Million for equipment/installation plus \$1 Million for maintenance agreements for 30 years). If this had been initially installed, it would have added **one-half of one percent** (.5%) to an approximately \$500 Million project. To put this into another perspective, that one-half of one percent would add \$200 onto the purchase of a \$40,000 car—the cost to add wheel locks, striping, or such nominal “add-on”!

Liberty’s response in committee and county commission discussions as to paying for the cost of this light-mitigating technology system? “We want to be a ‘good neighbor’ but we can’t justify passing the cost on to our ratepayers.” According to Liberty’s website, they deliver electricity to approximately 273,000 customers. This would equate to an approximately \$9.00 one-time cost to each customer; spread out over 30 years, a mere 2.5 cents per month! Ratepayers are on the hook for paying for the wind projects anyway, so what is a few more cents? By the way--Liberty’s “new look” logo is a heart laying on its side with 6 inner hearts—referring to it as a Radiant Heart “because we’re putting our heart where it matters.” It appears that the blight on our rural countryside just doesn’t matter, making them more “heartless” than that of a “radiant heart”. Having a heart would mean paying for this technology from their profits—rather than from ratepayers.

The blight on our dark rural night skies has been assaulted by the wind companies and passively endorsed by our state officials for the past 20 years. As turbine heights and the number of projects increase, the number of disgruntled Kansans affected by the blinking red lights will expand—unless regulations are established to bring back our dark rural night sky.

*“How often at night, when the heavens are bright
With the light of the glittering stars,
Have I stood here amazed and asked as I gazed
If their glory exceeds this of ours”*

(Verse 6 of “Home on the Range”, the Official State Song of Kansas)

These wind operators/owners **CAN** afford to install this technology to new and existing wind turbines, but they won’t unless there are regulations on the state level to requiring them to do so. Sadly, they must be forced to be “good neighbors”.

Please vote **“Yes” to pass SB 478** in order to reclaim our rural night skies from the blight inflicted by the industrial wind companies, and once again, view without obstruction the “light of the glittering stars”.