

Legislative Testimony
Support of Senate Bill 215
March 25, 2013
Testimony before Senate Federal and State Affairs Committee
Blake Benson, President, Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce

Good morning, Chairman Ostmeyer and members of the committee, and thank you for the opportunity to address you this afternoon. On behalf of the Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce and the Crawford County Convention & Visitors Bureau, I come before you today to urge your support for Senate Bill 215.

In the current economic environment where revenues are flat and needs are plenty, we feel that expanded gaming in southeast Kansas is an attractive option for increasing the state's revenue and supporting vital government services without increasing taxes on residents or businesses. However, unlike taxes, gaming provides Kansans the choice of whether or not to contribute. To us, that's as fair of an equation as you'll find. Plus, those who do choose gaming as a form of entertainment are also helping to support state services, such as highways, the education system and Medicaid, that we all use.

The numerous Oklahoma casinos located just 30 miles from Pittsburg have proven, without a doubt, that gaming can survive in our area if given a fair arrangement. These casinos are not only surviving, they're thriving, due in large part to the number of Kansas residents that patronize the Oklahoma casinos on a regular basis. For us as a border community, it's especially damaging because those people typically then go on to Joplin to eat dinner, catch a movie, do some shopping and fill their gas tanks before returning home to Kansas. Kansas businesses, Kansas workers and Kansas residents don't see a dime.

In terms of travel & tourism, we have seen numerous occasions when southeast Kansas lost a professional conference or a carload of tourists because there was little to do when they were here. Thanks to the investment by the state in a four-lane Highway 69 from Kansas City to Fort Scott, we've already seen an increase in the number of tourists traveling through our area. With future plans calling for this four-lane progress to continue all the way to Interstate 44, there's no doubt that our area will one day be located along one of the Midwest's primary north-south routes and will be a regional center for commerce, tourism and education. Entertainment is a big key to that puzzle.

Regardless of whether people initially travel here for our cuisine, to catch a PSU football game, or visit the Veteran's Memorial, there's little to hold visitors like this in our area once they finish with their original plans. So they move on. They move on to Joplin, Tulsa, Springfield, Northwest Arkansas or somewhere else that has the entertainment they crave. That's where they spend their money and that's where we, as Kansans, all lose. That is unacceptable.

Ladies and gentlemen, we're not looking for a handout. We ask only that you give us the tools we need to help ourselves. Senate Bill 215 would not only make southeast Kansas

more economically viable for our benefit, but all of Kansas. We realize that a handful of communities around the state, many of them represented by those of you on this committee, generate the revenue that powers the rest of the state, including us. We don't want that. We want to become an economic engine that can not only support ourselves, but also one that joins with you in powering all of Kansas. You can help make that a reality by voting yes on Senate Bill 215.

Thank you again for your time and consideration.