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**Written Testimony to the Senate Committee on Utilities
Regarding Senate Bill No. 576**

Chairman Emler, members of the committee, my name is Kirk Heger. I am a board member of the Southwest Kansas Irrigation Association. Our organization represents approximately 400 irrigators and businesses directly tied to irrigation in Southwest Kansas. We are testifying in support of Senate Bill 576.

The Hugoton gas field in Southwest Kansas has provided the State of Kansas with a great source of revenue for over 60 years. It also has provided the rural residences and rural businesses a “natural distribution system.” As the field was developed and wells were drilled and produced, those wells had to be connected to a central gathering facility to transport the gas to market. As the right of ways for these pipelines were granted, rural end users of gas were able to obtain access to provide fuel for various endeavors. In most cases a utility was placed between the producer gatherer and the rural end user. Those utilities were allowed certificates to serve these rural end users.

The Hugoton field has been mined over time and we now find ourselves in a precarious position. In a rapidly growing number of cases, the Hugoton field is depleted to the point of inadequate pressure and increasing contaminants, impeding the ability to provide adequate supplies for the rural end user.

As rural end users who have paid tariff rates for certificated service and have also provided for the State’s economy through agricultural production, we feel the KCC has not done enough to protect our interests. We need the same protections other residents of Kansas have. Our situation is only different because our “distribution” system is also a gathering system.

As long as gas is being mined in the Hugoton field and is being removed from our area via gathering lines, rural end users must be allowed access to this vital energy source. Rural end users must be protected from unwarranted abandonment of service.

This bill will give us at least some measure of security in planning for our future. Rural end users, whether they be homeowners, dairies, ethanol plants, farmers, feedlots, grain elevators, or even in many cases small municipalities, need to be guaranteed access to reliable safe supplies of natural gas, as long as such supplies exist.

As many of you may remember, our association has been very active in supporting legislation with the intent of protecting and serving the energy supply needs in rural Kansas. We introduced the gas-gathering bill in 1997 and the Rural Kansas Self-Help Gas Act in 2001. In the last session of this legislature HB 2530 was passed. All of these bills addressed the fundamental issue of providing protection to rural end users regarding their needs for a reliable safe supply of natural gas. And yet we are here again.

This time let us send a clear message to the KCC, the gatherers, and the producing companies. It is only right to cooperate and plan with the rural end users in Kansas to allow a continual and positive approach in planning for the future of our State.

Thanks for your attention and I will be happy to answer any questions at the appropriate time.