

Proponent Testimony for Senate Bill 279

Jackie Heideman; Corning, KS

Chairman Thompson and members of the Senate Utilities Committee:

Over the past several years, windfarms have popped up, on the horizon, all across Kansas. I am writing to you to express my concerns involving industrial windfarms and in support of Senate Bill 279. This bill provides much needed protection, for the health and well-being, of all Kansans.

My name is Jackie Heideman, former Mayor of the city of Corning, Kansas. Corning is an incorporated city in Nemaha county with less than 225 residents. We are proud of our small community, and in 2019 we received the Community Service Award from the Huck Boyd Institute for Rural Development. We are located at the epicenter of NextEra's Soldier Creek windfarm that consists of 120 industrial wind turbines, approximately 50 of which, are within three miles of our corporate city limits.

When our residents found out that Corning would be completely surrounded by the Soldier Creek Windfarm, a group of concerned citizens approached the city council to see if the City had any options to create a buffer around the town. As we researched our options, we found out that all municipalities large or small could be zoned and create a three mile extra territorial area to protect its community and for future potential growth. The process of zoning is a long and expensive road, of which small municipalities and many counties, in the state, do not have the expertise or resources to execute.

The mayor and council positions, in Corning, are held by common citizens with full time jobs outside of the City chambers, and still the City of Corning decided to pursue zoning. Zoning to provide our town and its residents protection from potential hazards and annoyances caused by having wind turbines situated so close.

Let me paint you a small picture of some of the proceedings: Our once simple, eventless, City Council meetings had grown in attendance and chaos. Several lawyers, representing the wind energy sector, made us believe they had the weight of the legal system behind them. They were nothing more than adult versions of playground bullies. Our meetings were taped and broadcast over Facebook. There was a clear division, amongst the people in attendance. We saw friends against friends, neighbors against neighbors, families against families. Council persons were made to canvas an exorbitant amount of phone calls at home from individuals on both sides. They also received many, at home visits from angry landowners. Our community service obligations were taking over our lives and not in a good way. One council person suffered from extreme anxiety and panic, to the point

that he resigned his position on the council. Yet another council person was made to worry about his job, as he was threatened with losing it, to the point that he was essentially silenced when it came to any votes pertaining to wind energy. We were in unexplored waters, and to say we felt like we were in over our heads, is an understatement. We felt pushed to make quick decisions to keep moving forward with the process, all while being criticized and brow beat by the opposition. The opposition was led by the wind industry and their unlimited resources. It was made very clear that they coerced our community members to lash out at anyone with a differing opinion. Their money and power added fuel to the fire. Eventually the City was threatened with legal action, by the wind industry, and ultimately felt compelled to stop our efforts in the zoning process. Our little community simply did not have the resources to fight Big Wind. I experienced firsthand the power and clout the wind industry has behind it. They take every advantage they can and will take down anyone or anything that tries to stand in their way.

Every time big wind companies go up against a Kansas county or city, they gain power, and at the end of the day, big wind companies are going with any option that makes them the most money and not what is for the greater good of citizens living in our communities or our state. The wind industry wants decisions regarding regulations to be at the local level not the State level. One might wonder why that is. But not this former mayor. I know exactly why. It is because they can overwhelm a small municipality with their dominating presence and strong arm their way into your neighborhood and make up regulations that benefit their companies and not your citizens.

In conclusion, Kansas has no statewide rulebook on the setbacks that govern how close a turbine can sit next to roads, homes or to a non-participating property line. Counties across the state have been forced to figure out regulations, as they go, on an ad hoc basis. That's created a hodgepodge of agreements and regulations ranging from one extreme to the other. Policy makers must recognize these challenges and face them head on with clear and consistent regulations statewide. No other small community in Kansas should have to go through the same hardships as Corning has over the past two years. Our community has wounds that may never heal, and that is why I encourage you to vote in support of Senate Bill 279.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jackie Heideman

