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House of Representatives

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**Before the Committee on Taxation  
Testimony on HB 2298  
March 11, 2015**

Chairman Kleeb, Vice Chair Suellentrop and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to your committee today, in support of HB 2298

In 2011 Governor Brownback recognized rural counties were losing population at a rate of 10% or higher and asked the legislature to work on a bill to create Rural Opportunity Zones. Since the inception more than 2,000 applications have been submitted. With the Rural Opportunity Zone Western Kansas has been successful in attracting new families to our rural communities.

I would like to mention some of the counties that I represent and nearby counties that have benefited from this program. Greeley County, with a population of approximately 1,298 people, a county with the smallest population in the state, has had 42 applications. When you factor in some of these applicants are married and have children the percentage of population growth for that county is astounding.

The counties I represent have received the following applications; Sherman County, my home county, has had 54 applications. Thomas County has had 65 applications, Wallace County 22 applications, Rawlins County 22 applications, Decatur County 31 applications, and Cheyenne County 22 applications. One nearby county, Norton, has had 71 applications.

These numbers may not sound large to the average person but a few families moving into rural Kansas makes a huge impact. Sometimes it is hard to convince people to move into a community where you may have to drive 60 miles to have a birthday party at the nearest Gambino's or a happy meal at McDonald's.

The economic engine of rural Kansas is agriculture upon which our economy depends. Many uncontrollable factors such as weather conditions, grain prices to name a few. When agriculture is doing well communities flourish, however during a down turn the whole community suffers.

In closing I urge you to vote to continue the Rural Opportunity Zone program. Thank you and I stand for questions.