



COUNTY OF LEAVENWORTH

From the desk of Commissioner Mike Stieben

300 Walnut, Suite 225

Leavenworth, Kansas 66048-2815

(913)684-0417

Fax (913) 680-2742

Email: mstieben@leavenworthcounty.gov

Commissioners Testify for Property Tax Relief, Commissioner Stieben goes to Washington, Economic Development, Tonganoxie Annexation, Amtrak funding, and the Rodeo.

Property Tax Relief

On February 13 Leavenworth County Commissioners Willie Dove and Mike Stieben testified before the Kansas House of Representatives Committee on Taxation in support of property tax relief legislation. The Commissioners expressed support for SCR 1603 which is a Constitutional Amendment which includes a 3% cap on taxes resulting from yearly property valuation increases. This Resolution has already been approved by a 2/3 vote of the Kansas Senate and is awaiting a vote by the full Kansas House. The House committee was considering an alternative approach contained in HCR 5011 which would establish a rolling average rather than a cap on taxes. Commissioners expressed support for the cap but made it clear that the legislature must act because the people of Kansas are suffering under the increasing burden of these taxes.

Commissioner Stieben goes to Washington

During the first week of March Commissioner Stieben attended the NACO (National Association of Counties) Conference in Washington D.C.. During the Conference many issues were debated including many issues related to immigration with a clear split between Commissioners from different areas of the nation. Many members including most members from Kansas support the approach taken by the Trump Administration to remove illegal immigrants from our nation with special emphasis upon those who have committed crimes in the United States.

During the Conference members also had the opportunity to visit with the offices of our Federal elected officials. I was able to visit with Senator Moran's Chief of Staff James Kelly and other congressional staff members from Senator Marshall and Senator Hawley's offices. Some issues discussed included PILT (Payment in lieu of taxes) for Leavenworth County's loss of property tax valuation due to exempted federal properties. Many other communities with military installations have been able to receive payments for lost property tax revenues in the form of yearly payments.

This issue has come to surface because currently commercial enterprises on DOD and VA property in Kansas, including rental properties that are open to non-military personnel, do not participate in paying local taxes. That puts local government at a disadvantage when trying to maintain infrastructure. In some areas around the country military installations pay a PILT to local government for the impact they have on the local infrastructure but not in Kansas. The proposal is to require payment equivalent to if that same property were not tax exempt. We informed the offices of our federal legislators that we are aware that other military installations already have these types of agreements.

Other issues that were discussed included additional Congressionally appropriated funds for completions of work on CR 30 (235th St), additional road bridge and infrastructure funding, and the proposed 152 bridge project.

Economic Development

Economic Development became a flashpoint between Leavenworth County Development Corporation (LCDC) and the Leavenworth County Commissioners. The new leadership of the economic development organization announced that Commissioner Vanessa Reid who had been appointed by the Commission as board representative would not be allowed voting rights.

The LCDC leadership announced a new interpretation of their by-laws, which stated their belief that the county government is not officially a "member" of the organization because county funds of approximately \$85,000 are routed thru the Port Authority and then given to the LCDC Board rather than given directly. Thus, under this interpretation the County is not considered a "paying member to LCDC" and would not qualify for a Board seat. This new interpretation came in spite of the fact that previously the county representative was allowed to be seated.

Despite any "interpretation" the fact is Leavenworth County is the largest funding arm for LCDC and most of the over \$700,000 in reserve at the Port Authority is also taxpayer dollars provided to that organization by Leavenworth County.

There will be a work session on Economic Development after the County Commission meeting on March 12th. Hopefully all of the various issues which are in contention between the parties can be addressed and we can see a team effort on economic development moving forward.

Tonganoxie Annexation

An additional hearing on the voluntary annexation by the city of Tonganoxie of land used for industrial purposes will be held at the Leavenworth County Commission meeting to be held on March 26th. This hearing was necessitated by the decision of Judge Bryant when he reviewed the previous annexation attempt. I have been supportive of the position taken by the city of Tonganoxie on the annexation issue.