

**Testimony Prepared for the
Kansas House
Standing Committee on General Government Budget
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Good morning. My name is Caleb May and I am the director of the Meade Public Library in Meade, KS. Though I have only been in the Meade community for a year, I am originally from a small town in northeast Kansas and am very familiar with the essential role that small public libraries play in the lives of rural Kansans.

Personally, I would describe myself as a strong fiscal conservative and I am painfully aware that in tough economic times especially, cuts have to be made across the board. However, small public libraries in Kansas have been cut consistently over the past 8 years primarily in a substantial decline of our general state aid, but also because of the state government placing more financial burdens on the shoulders of county and municipal governments thereby shrinking the available funds for libraries.

Fundamentally we have to ask ourselves what are the essential roles of government in our society and who is positioned best to provide those functions. I believe that the American government should be oriented from bottom to top rather than from top down. Since "We the People" are the government, in order to remain informed regarding information crucial to hold our elected officials accountable, we must have

access to the World Wide Web. The only institution currently offering free access to high-speed internet in rural Kansas communities is the public library. With increasing patronage and library use and decreasing sources of funding the rural Kansas public library is at its breaking point.

The legislation before you, HB2390, would, "abolish," Kan-Ed and, "utilize a competitive bidding process to select a neutral, competent and bonded third party to administer the KUSF." Do you really want to subject the future of rural Kansas libraries to the whims of the private sector? Essential government functions, such as access to information through libraries, do not always make sense in a purely dog-eat-dog economy. We have to ask ourselves if investing in the future of our democratic republic is worth the expense. Information technology administration, unlike competitive bidding in a bricks and mortar-type endeavor, would be much more likely to exist entirely outside of the state of Kansas. Why should we contribute to the continued outsourcing of the Kansas economy? Is Kan-Ed perfect? Probably not. Could it be improved? Probably so, but it is generally not prudent to throw out the baby with the bath water.

Kan-Ed currently provides small Kansas libraries with affordable high-speed internet without which our library would be crippled. For remote communities like Meade, high-speed internet provides not only the convenience of accessing information in a timely manner, but also connects us with the outside world.

Currently all inter-library loan requests are processed through a third-party networking software system that connects us to libraries throughout the state, and also nationwide. Without high-speed internet access inter-library loan would require an immense increase in man-hours which cannot be maintained by a small library and would thus eliminate our patrons' access to information. Meade Public Library borrows approximately 100 materials per month from other libraries and lends 70 materials per month to other libraries. Almost 2,000 materials would be unavailable to patrons from our library and those of other surrounding communities.

Another essential function requiring high-speed internet is cataloging. Without high-speed internet access each library would have to purchase bibliographic records for every item added to the collection, thus increasing cost and decreasing available materials. We would also have to find an off-line analog method of managing our collection – remember the old, card catalog? Manually thumbing through cards in

an effort to find the item you are seeking.

Circulation would also be turned back 30 years as we would no longer be able to scan items for check-out, but would have to stamp each card. This would not only be time-consuming, but increase the non-return of library materials.

Currently my patrons have direct access through our automation system to databases such as Gale academic journals, genealogical research, and Chilton automotive repair manuals. These services would be rendered unattainable without high-speed internet. Currently we have 2 ½ yards of shelf space taken up with outdated Chilton auto repair manuals from the 1980's and 90's. If our patrons lose access to the online databases we will be forced to acquire new Chilton manuals which are very costly and require prohibitive amounts of shelf space – and this is simply one example. Imagine libraries keeping roles upon roles of microfiche records.

The state of Kansas is making efforts to revitalize rural areas and attract investment businesses and residents from outside of the state. Without vibrant, 21st century libraries, how do we possibly expect reasonable, educated individuals to invest their futures in an area which the government of the state of Kansas has abandoned? A six hour round trip drive to a bookstore makes it difficult for even middle-class Kansans to acquire affordable educational, informational, and recreational information.

At the Meade library we have seen a decrease in state funding from \$1,371 in 2002 to \$862 in 2010 – a decrease of \$507 in only eight years which amounts to a 37% decrease in revenue. Over that same period of time, we have seen a increase in the number of patrons using the library, especially in areas related to Kan-Ed discounts (i.e. interlibrary loan, access to online databases, educational uses of computers, and online public access catalog searching.) Peter Haxton, State Data Center Coordinator, tells me that over the last five years public libraries in Kansas have seen an increase of over 1.1 million internet computer users.

In conclusion, rural Kansas public libraries depend upon the services made available because of Kan-Ed funding. Should you choose to cut the services made available to rural Kansas libraries by Kan-Ed and fail to replace it by any equivalent funding

increase from another source, the days of the rural Kansas public library are numbered. Many will be forced to close in a number of months, not years and with each closure of a public library a cascading effect on the remaining libraries would ultimately result in tens of thousands of Kansans without access to the basic means of information and knowledge acquisition requisite for successful self-government. As the director of a rural Kansas library, I urge you to vote NO on HB2390.

"An investment in knowledge always pays interest." Benjamin Franklin

"Don't join the book-burners. Don't be afraid to go in your library and read every book." Eisenhower

"I cannot live without books." Thomas Jefferson

"A man has no ears for that to which experience has given him no access."
Nietzsche

"An army of principles can penetrate where an army of soldiers cannot." Thomas Payne

"Beware of the man with one book." Thomas Aquinas

"What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly; it is dearness only that gives everything its value." Thomas Paine

"Educate and inform the whole mass of the people... They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty." Thomas Jefferson

"Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government." Thomas Jefferson

"Where the press is free and every man able to read, all is safe." Thomas Jefferson

"An educated people can be easily governed." Frederick The Great

“Education is a better safeguard of liberty than a standing army.” Edward Everett

“Reading builds the educated and informed electorate so vital to our democracy.”
Brad Henry