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House of Representatives

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Steven C. Johnson
Representative, 108th District

Testimony of Representative Steven C. Johnson
Proponent of **SB263**

Chairman Hoffman and members of the committee:

My name is Steven Johnson and I serve with you as a member of the House of Representatives from the 108th district south and west of Salina.

I appear before you today as a proponent of Senate Bill 263.

My discussion and investigation of industrial hemp began at the water vision conference in October of 2014. There we speculated about whether industrial hemp, since it seems to grow most anywhere, might be a crop with a lower water requirement. The 2014 U.S. farm bill had removed the requirement to obtain a DEA permit for departments of agriculture and research institutions to grow industrial hemp for research purposes. However, our state law still prohibits the growing of hemp.

Through World War II it was a fairly prevalent crop in our state as well as across the nation. To know whether it would be viable in Kansas today, we began to discuss several questions. Many have now been addressed by research and production in other states.

What are the economic opportunities?

The uses of industrial hemp are many and varied, using the stalk for fiber, the flower and leaves for oil and the seed for foodstuffs and oil products. Key products include hemp seed foods, hemp oil, wax, resin, rope, cloth, pulp, paper and fuel. The paper is very high quality. The seeds are very high in omega 3's. This may provide exciting opportunities in foods. The oils are useful in a variety of applications and popular in cosmetics. There are broad applications in building and clothing products.

Equipment now exists that is specifically adapted to harvest and handle hemp. If the crop becomes more widespread, there may still be additional opportunities to develop more efficient equipment. Kansas companies might be well positioned to meet some remainder of this market demand.

In 1940, Henry Ford built an automobile out of hemp and soy plastic and ran it on hemp ethanol. The strength of the plastic body was demonstrated by Ford swinging an ax at it without inflicting damage.

It is in our interest to find out what possibilities exist for several of our Kansas industries.

What agronomic impacts or benefits might we have?

Hemp has the ability to grow almost anywhere, resist pests and crowd out weeds. The plant grows quickly which provides a canopy over the soil and natural weed control. Fiber varieties mature quickly which may give us an option to produce more than one crop in a growing season. Grain varieties can require a longer to mature. Even in fiber production, over 40% of the plant's biomass returns to the soil in the form of roots and leaves. More organic matter would be returned in varieties just grown for grain. The taproot could be a useful component in no-till environments. Benefits in crop rotations could be important.

What is the water requirement?

Data provided from several studies shows the water requirement for industrial hemp to be comparable to a wheat crop at 12 – 15 inches per year. Nonetheless, we need to confirm the water requirement and what varieties might grow well in various parts of the state.

Summation:

If we want meaningfully different outcomes on issues such as economic development or water use, we will have to identify and explore meaningfully different opportunities. Industrial hemp may provide opportunities in agriculture, food, building, textiles, paper, polymer development, aviation, agricultural machinery and other areas where Kansas has or could have strengths. I hope you will join me in supporting SB 263.