

TESTIMONY: GRANT COUNTY FARM BUREAU

SB 432

Senate Rules Committee

June 26, 2017

Chair Burdick and Members of the Committee:

Grant County Farm Bureau writes today to express concern over the by SB 432 and the -13 amendments. We are one of the counties that would be allowed to take the exception under the bill for any business or housing reason.

Agriculture is the life-blood of Grant County. With nearly \$25 million in economic value as of 2012, agriculture is the primary economic driver of the County and critical to our county's future. Our farms and ranches support local businesses and provide jobs to the community. While we want to see more economic activity brought into our county, SB 432 is not the right solution for Grant County.

Grant County is beautiful, and we have seen an increase in the last several years in people buying agricultural lands in Grant County to use for fancy vacation homes, hunting, or other "amenity" related values. These uses reduce or remove the productive value of these lands by taking them out of production and removing that economic activity from the land. This bill would exacerbate this problem significantly. Under the bill, an amenity owner would no longer have to buy an entire farm or ranch to build their vacation home; instead, the county could authorize partitioning of parcels to allow "trophy homes" and vacation homes on smaller lot sizes. In just a few years, we could have hundreds of these homes where there used to be productive agricultural lands. This would have a significant impact on the economic activity in the county, and jeopardize the success of the remaining farms and ranches who could lose access to services provided by Grant County's agricultural activity. We do not want to see our county become a vacation haven that is only populated 3 months of out of the year.

We have a lot of buildable and developable land in Grant County that is ready for businesses to move in to increase economic activity. However, businesses are not moving in because we are located in such a remote area and lack the infrastructure they need to be successful, and because other permits (water, removal-fill, etc) are so difficult to receive.

SB 432 would drive up land prices in our county and put property out of reach of farmers and ranchers in favor of absentee amenity owners. Allowing the county to change the zoning on property without any regard for impacts to neighbors also increases the potential for conflicts which make farming and ranching more difficult.

While the bill does contain a carve out for "high value farmland," the definition used would protect very few of Grant County's valuable farms and ranches.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on SB 432. I ask you to vote 'no' on this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Thomas', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jeff Thomas
President, Grant County Farm Bureau