

<< TESTIMONY ON SB2146 >>

Good morning Chairman Kasper & House GVA Committee. For the record, my name is Carel Two-Eagle. I'm here in support of SB2146.

As you know, I'm behind the push to bring the ND State Capitol building into compliance with the ADA – the Americans with Disabilities Act. The new public entrance you & I got for The People's House during the interim from 2019 is a great improvement. But the inside of this monument to North Dakota and the way its people want this state to be seen is more than 30 years out of compliance with the requirements of the 1990 requirements of the ADA, to say nothing of the requirements of the 2008 Amendments, and that cannot continue.

For one thing, it is a felony under the ADA to refuse to accommodate people covered under the ADA. This poses an interesting question, should some handicapped activist decide to file one or more charges against the State of North Dakota, does it not? How embarrassing would that be? I'd say, "Very". But right now, the State of North Dakota, including its Legislature, are vulnerable to just such a thing. Worse, because the building is more than 30 *years* out of compliance, there are likely to be OSHA violations as well. It appears we have the potential – even, the likelihood – for big black marks, & possibly fines, on the image & reputation of North Dakota. Do you think the people of North Dakota will regard such, smilingly? I don't.

This building is more than a museum piece – it is a monument, as I said before. We already know that North Dakota is not seen by much of the United States as a leader or a tourist mecca. But to people who are handicapped or who have loved ones who are handicapped, it is seen more darkly. In its current condition, it is seen as a state where its People's House at the least doesn't care about the difficulties we who live behind the 8-ball face daily, or at the worst, where its leadership refuses to consider our needs and work to accommodate us. Yet we who are handicapped have jobs, or businesses which create jobs, we pay taxes, and we vote. This strikes me as an embarrassing situation, when the State's official position, via its lack of efforts to comply with the ADA as a matter of showing basic respect for others, is evidenced by it People's House. Actions speak louder than words.

Since I got all this started through Representative Marvin Nelson's HB1298 in 2019, & now during this 2021 Session, I saw a need to become an ADA Compliance consultant. I found an online course offered by a major university and – despite the fact that I work 16 hours a day every day – I took the course & am now an ADA Compliance consultant. I learned a lot in taking that course, & even if I hadn't, the fact remains that North Dakota's People's House is *not* friendly or welcoming to

handicapped citizens. Now that we have greatly improved the entry aspects, it is time to improve the inside, where the State's business is done.

HB1030 and its identical twin, SB2146, asked for \$750,000 to bring this magnificent building up to 2008's ADAAA standards. I am grateful for that, but I'm asking you to add \$500,000 to that, to bring the building past merely "up to the standards required 13 years ago". This and the improvements it will fund, will be an action that will speak strongly to both North Dakota's official position that it cares about handicapped citizens, but also to an apology for having ignored a considerable – even, a growing – segment of its citizens, for so long. Citizens who are productive, but who need "a little help to get by from their friends", to paraphrase a song. In this case, "friends" will include the ND Legislature. It will include you. The larger amount will speak about being pro-active & energetic in *showing* respect to handicapped people, & in recognizing that handicaps have a wide range, where one size or kind of accommodation can't fit everyone. One size never has, & it never could, fit all.

I don't care whether both bills pass or you kill HB1030, which is an "agency" bill, but I care greatly that you stand solidly behind its identical twin, SB2146, amended to increase its funding by \$500,000, and show the world that North Dakota *officially* cares about ease of access & functionality for all of its citizens when they come into The People's House. You never get a second chance to make a first impression, after all..

You & I know you care.. You & I know this needs doing now, is required by federal law to be done now, not "someday". But in order to bring tourists to North Dakota & to make its businesses able to compete more strongly, you & I know that you need to *show* the world that North Dakota doesn't merely claim to be great, but that it *works* to be, & you do that by giving SB2146, amended to add \$500,000, a unanimous Do Pass recommendation & getting the rest of the Legislature to agree, because this is something leaders do. Leaders don't just meet minimum requirements. Leaders go beyond them.

Thank you for hearing me. I am always available to answer any questions.