

HB 1419 – Testimony by Dustin Gawrylow (Lobbyist #266) North Dakota Watchdog Network

From April 2017 to August 2018, I served as an appointed member of the Bismarck Special Assessment Task Force, and the subsequent Infrastructure and Special Assessment Joint Task Force.

I've attached the summary sheet that I have used as a guide to talking about the Task Forces work, starting in October 2018 when myself and Bismarck City Administrator Keith Hunke spoke to the Fargo Special Assessment Task Force.

HB 1419 is intended to allow cities like Bismarck to find new and creative ways to fix their own financing models for infrastructure, and reduce burdens on taxpayers.

This issue at the state level, as the 2019 version of this bill showed, gets bogged down in the details.

It is my belief that in the name of Local Control, the legislature should grant every political subdivision the leeway to develop new financing models and sell those models to their own voters via Home Rule Charter Amendments. The Bismarck Special Assessment Task Force was the first step in that process, but hit a wall when it was discovered that a 2017 bill prevented such things from happening.

Recently, the City of Bismarck commissioned a Market Study with AE2S to figure out how to create a new financing structure. And to be honest, I'm not real happen with a lot of the conclusions myself because the study apparently did not take much of the Task Force's work into account. I have made this displeasure very clear to city commissioners and city staff as we've all had a very good working relationship on this issue.

For instance, the study looked at things like "Commercial Trip Generation" which to me sounds like a euphemism for a mileage tax – which is something I will never support.

I also agree with much of the Bismarck Downtowners' concerns, which they will tell you about

However, I do not believe these objections should sideline the whole project. Clearly we have more work to do before we have a tax reform ready for prime time to sell to voters. But I urge you to find a way to enable Bismarck to come up with a plan that can help them help themselves.

Because at the end of the day, this helps get the legislature out of the property tax business.

I urge a DO PASS on HB 1419 in some format.