

January 28, 2021

SB 2040

Senator Joan Heckaman

Chairman Holmberg and Members of the Committee:

I am Sen. Joan Heckaman from District 23 and I am here in support of SB 2040 and to provide you with a few examples of how this bill can be the road map for our future in North Dakota.

HOUSING INCENTIVE FUND: I want to start with one of the most significant differences in this bill as compared to other bonding bills we may see this session. SB 2040's component of funding for single family and multi-family housing will fill the void identified by Mr. David Flohr, Executive Director of the North Dakota Housing Finance Agency, in his presentation to this committee. According to Mr. Flohr, there is "a shortage of affordable housing for households on fixed incomes, low wage earners, and persons experiencing homelessness." SB 2040 identifies the need and through the Housing Incentive Fund, assures families and individuals can live in affordable housing.

SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS: Additional funding for the school construction revolving fund will incentivize districts to complete projects they have on hold or design new projects to provide safe and energy efficient environments for our students. These projects can be new builds or can be renovations. This fund is a revolving loan fund and will maintain a perpetual amount for schools to access well into the future.

As you can see on page 8, line 25, institutions of higher education can also apply to utilize this funding stream. UND has wanted to build a new College of business and Public Administration for more than 15 years. The legislature provided \$20 million to this project, with the rest being made up through private donations. SB 2040 could have been used for this project and to support other higher education capital projects or renovations. And while we are talking about projects, why not fund the Ag Products Development Center at NDSU? That project is crucial to the success of family farmers and ranchers. Overall, this bill can provide years of assured funding for our campuses.

What other projects could this fund support? Our Career and Technical Academies could be constructed. We heard here in Appropriations how valuable those academies are, and several communities across the state are looking to those centers for workforce training.

ROADS AND BRIDGES: The funds in Section 5 subsection 2 e are essential to the commerce in North Dakota. This bill is an economic driver with benefits that are hard to quantify because we all need good roads and bridges to get to work, ensure the movement of goods and services, and provide a safe and secure system for our families.

One of my own concerns has been the damage to roads and bridges from the excess moisture, including both rain and snow, that has triggered Presidential Disaster Declarations. Why am I concerned? I am concerned because of the conditions of the roads that carry our children to school each day. School bus drivers are stressed every day that they must travel country roads that have been washed out, not properly reconstructed, or are in very dangerous conditions because of these disasters.

We also heard in this committee the infrastructure needs as identified by the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute. Senator Wanzek can be assured that with this bonding bill, townships in his legislative district can get those roads back into safe driving conditions. This bill identifies 26% of a county's share, which is proportional to their total miles of road, will go to townships.

Mr. Chairman, I could go on and on about the projects this bonding bill can support including rural water and natural gas to communities. In most cases, if you can imagine it, there will be funds in here to support it. Well, maybe not all, but there is not time to talk about all the benefits from this bill. I ask for your support for SB 2040.

That concludes my testimony and I would stand for questions.