

Chairman Kruen, members of the committee, my name is Ryan Warner. I am custodian of Synthesis.Earth, a connective technology company here in Bismarck, as well as co-owner of Lightspring, an energy technology company headquartered in Bismarck. I am speaking before you in opposition to HB 1452.

If passed, HB 1452 creates a “Clean Sustainable Energy Authority” to dole out public monies to private companies to develop clean sustainable energy.

While “clean sustainable energy” sounds cool, there are major problems with this bill.

First, the voting members who determine what gets funded are almost exclusively represented by oil, gas, and coal interests. This means the innovations funded by this proposed Authority will likely center around “clean coal” and carbon capture technology, among many other moonshot proposals to clean up the oil, gas, and coal industries.

Innovative and creative solutions like the ones targeted by the proposed “clean sustainable energy authority” are now understood to be products of diverse perspectives. The greater the number of divergent perspectives that are brought together into one room to tackle a problem, the more innovative outcomes and solutions will emerge. This is because diverse groups cover for individual blindspots, and the mix of perspectives creates cross-discipline connections that would have never occurred with more homogenous groups.

As reported in the Wall Street Journal last year, “Multiple viewpoints from a variety of industries, economic backgrounds, educational experiences...bring a more complete perspective to developing...relevant solutions. Solving problems regarding what and how to innovate requires the same diversity.”¹

I know first hand how diverse groups can overcome long odds and make a big difference in a short time. As some of you may have noticed, I am a part of an ad hoc group that emerged out of nowhere to fight this bill. We have little money and few resources but within a couple weeks have been able to stand up to the richest and most well-resourced special interests in the state to mount what Ron Ness is now calling “significant opposition”. (Thanks Ron).

We are an ideologically diverse group - consisting of conservatives, moderates, pragmatists, and progressives - and in the process of collaboration have pushed and sharpened each other's ideas to become something greater than the sum of our individual parts. This is the old “Team of Rivals” approach popularized by President Lincoln where he purposely stacked his cabinet with rival perspectives and competing ideas. Eventually, the competition between ideas leads to a synthesis representing the best of all possible worlds and leads to true growth and innovation.

HB 1452 is a form of “innovation” as imagined by people whose only creativity comes from devising new ways to game the system to benefit themselves. In essence, the decision making body of HB 1452 is made up of insiders, elites, and rich special interest groups. The only

¹ <https://deloitte.wsj.com/cio/2020/01/13/foster-innovation-ethical-tech-with-diverse-teams/>

“innovation” a group like that can muster is the kind of innovation that consists of finding new ways to funnel public money into their own pockets.

Now, because “clean coal” and carbon capture tech is unproven and speculative, the bill sponsors of HB 1452 have also decided to protect the intellectual property of private companies, exempting all funding decisions, projects, applicants, and technical reviewers from ND’s open records law. In other words, money will go into this fund, and then it will disappear into thin air to fund something someone somewhere thinks might make things somewhat “cleaner” at some undefined point in the future.

Not only are we forming a team of elites and insiders to funnel \$40 million dollars of public money into their own pockets every 2 years, we are doing it without meaningful public oversight.

Before I conclude, I’d like to take a step back, because there is something at play even worse than poor governance structure and a lack of transparency. It’s the fact that the authors of this bill are using language games to cloak their intent. Think about it, this bill is the product of the governor’s office, the ND Republican Party, and the oil, gas, and coal industries. Our governor is a tech millionaire and advertising genius who often throws his money around to get what he wants. The ND GOP has done such an amazing job winning almost every election in the state that they now enjoy a monopoly on political power in North Dakota. And the oil, gas, and coal industries represent by far the greatest concentration of economic power in the state. Together, these 3 groups have all the power in the world to do exactly what they want and yet they are still afraid to tell us what they’re doing. Instead of showing us their plan, they write up a bill riddled with euphemisms and energy agnostic language to cloak their intentions. I mean, just look at page 1, line 23, where the authors of HB 1452 define “low-emission technology” as “coal, oil, [and] natural gas.” If coal, oil, and natural gas were “low-emission technology” we wouldn’t even need a Clean Sustainable Energy Authority in the first place. What game are they playing?

I don’t have to tell you that public trust in government is at an all-time low. We’ve been lied to, intentionally misled, and buried under an impenetrable layer of bureaucracy. If the authors of this bill can’t even trust us enough to tell us their big plan, then how can we trust them?

If this is such a good plan, then show us. Put the plan in the bill. Maybe it is a great plan, but there’s no way to know. Use accurate and honest language to describe it and then we can talk about it and vet it and maybe even make it better.

The authors of HB 1452 are calling this the “Clean Sustainable Energy Authority,” but as we’ve seen when you look into the details what they really want is the authority to give handouts to the state’s richest private companies to fund unproven technology without any meaningful public oversight. They talk about carbon capture, but the only thing they want to capture is cash. And on top of that they don’t even respect us enough to lay out their plan.

The Clean Sustainable Energy Authority has no clean or sustainable representatives. It’s

expensive PR that creates a secret slush fund for the state's richest special interest groups. As such, I urge a DO NOT PASS designation for HB 1452.