

HOUSE GOVERNMENT AND VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
REPRESENTATIVE AUSTEN SCHAUER, CHAIR

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BY

MICHAEL HOWE, SECRETARY OF STATE

Chairman Schauer and members of the committee, I'm Michael Howe, North Dakota Secretary of State. I'm here to provide supporting testimony for SB 2230. This bill seeks to have the Secretary of State create and distribute information to voters by mail related to statewide ballot measures and the impacts of their yes or no vote.

SB 2230 would have our office send information regarding any statewide ballot measures to eligible voters prior to statewide elections that include ballot measures. Our office currently provides the ballot title, official ballot summary and fiscal impact for statewide measures on our website, however this would expand that information to include where the measure originated from – legislative action, initiated, or referred measure – as well as an objective analysis of what a vote in favor or opposition means. Most states provide information on ballot measures to their voters. About half of the states do this through online sources with varied information provided, the other half practice what this bill requires in mailing a “voter guide” to either households or individual voters.

Our office often receives calls during the election season from members of the public wanting more detail about specific ballot measures. We often point them to our website for the full ballot initiative text.

We do have one proposed amendment that was missed on the senate side that would make sure this bill is inclusive of the individuals the sponsor intended.

- Page 1, line 12: Replacement of “~~secured active~~” with “active voter.” Secured active is a status used to protect the records of law enforcement, judges, etc., so the original language excluded all other qualified voters which was not the intent of the sponsor. Active voter would include those who voted in a statewide election in the last 4 years, and those who have received and maintained a North Dakota driver's or North Dakota non-driver's ID, are United States citizens, and are 18 years of age by the date of the election.

This bill has a \$600,000 appropriation, which is our estimate related to printing and mailing costs for a piece that may provide information for possibly 1 or 2 measures to voters. If we would have 5 ballot measures as we did in the past election cycle, our office would need to seek greater funding through the Emergency Commission.

Chairman Schauer and members of the committee that concludes my testimony and I'll stand for any questions.

Fiscal note breakdown:

Estimated Numbers X 2 elections - This number is based on 2 elections in a biennial cycle and would not include any statewide special elections.

Active Voters – 450,000 (we have 594,140 eligible, but not all are considered “active voter” as described above)

Postage – \$400,000 (bulk rates range from .38 - .50 per piece) Printing - \$200,000 (envelopes/mailer)