

March 6, 2025

Members of the Political Subdivisions Committee of the North Dakota House of Representatives

What dreams do you have for your time as a legislator? Whether they be modest or grand, I'm glad you have the opportunity to dream. I hope other legislators who will pass judgement on Senate Bill 2097 will take a moment to reflect on their dreams as well.

As a lifelong resident of North Dakota, a graduate of Garrison High School and the University of North Dakota, I urge you to support this legislation that will invite rural communities to pursue their dreams. As a rural priest-pastor, currently serving Catholic parishes in McClusky, Drake, and Anamoose, I see too many dreams die too quickly in our small communities, when we dare to dream at all.

The opportunity provided by the proposed Rural Community Endowment Fund can spread the power of dreams and hope across small communities around the state. Financial challenges are too often the hurdle that so many of us can't get past to put forth the effort to work to make our dreams a reality.

Portions of North Dakota are enjoying a prosperity not experienced in many years. Our larger communities are busting at the seams, those in the Bakken region have benefitted immensely from local philanthropy while they have dealt with the challenges of development. It's time to share a little of the prosperity with more of our small rural communities. A modest fund to support the dreams of small towns would be an act of hope on your part as our lawmakers and overseers of North Dakota's financial resources.

I see the kinds of ideas the Busch Foundation is advancing through the work of Stengthen ND. I've been on the receiving end of a couple of their grants. I've met with other grant recipients and the energy in the room as we discuss our projects, challenges, and opportunities is inspiring. And some things are getting accomplished! I hope the State of North Dakota will promote that kind of hope among our rural communities. The Rural Community Endowment Fund can support that hope. I encourage you to support passage SB 2097 creating the Rural Community Endowment Fund.

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