

INTRODUCTION

By Representative Mary Schneider of
HB 1568--North Dakota Ireland Trade Commission

Senate Industry and Business Committee

Senator Jeff Barta, Chairman--Senator Keith Boehm, Vice Chairman

March 17, 2025

Good morning, Chairman Barta, Vice Chairman Boehm, and distinguished members of the Senate Industry and Business Committee. I am Representative Mary Schneider, and I proudly represent the people of District 21 in central Fargo and West Fargo.

I'm before you to introduce House Bill 1568, which is co-sponsored by three of four bipartisan co-chairs of the North Dakota American Irish Legislators Caucus, and others interested in the creation of a North Dakota Ireland Trade Commission.

This bill aims to establish a new chapter in title 54 of the North Dakota Century Code, focusing on enhancing bilateral trade and investment between North Dakota and Ireland. The commission will promote business and academic exchanges, encourage mutual economic support, and address issues of mutual benefit. The commission will consist of two appointed members from our state Senate, and two from the House of Representatives, the Executive Director of the North Dakota Trade Office, another person knowledgeable about, and interested in, international trade, and the Agriculture Commissioner or his designee.

The bill outlines the administration, meeting schedules, and reimbursement policies for commission members, and mandates an annual report to legislative management detailing the commission's activities, benefits, and recommendations for supporting trade between North Dakota and Ireland.

My information from the time the bill was first drafted was that 19 U.S. states had passed a similar commission with three more that were scheduled to pass one by the end of last year, and around 14 on tap to consider a commission in 2025.

This would be our state's first trade commission, and for that honor, Ireland is a proper pick. It would allow us to partner with a country that has always been our friend and supporter. But there are also other reasons to have Ireland be our prototype, pilot project, or test drive.

Our American Irish Legislative Caucus has bound us together directly for some years now. North Dakota members were invited to Ireland as official guests to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Good Friday Peace Agreement in 2023, a document which was promoted, negotiated, and

supported by American George Mitchell among others, and helped bring peace between Northern Ireland and the Republic.

But our countries' longstanding inter-relationship extends back much further. Between the Irish famine in the mid-1800s and 1920, 3.7 million Irish emigrated to America, bringing families that multiplied to every state until by 1900 there were more Irish in America than in Ireland.

The Irish then and now can be disproportionately found in U.S. government, politics, and public services like law enforcement.

Twenty-two American Presidents have claimed Irish roots (although only 15 have proved it). The current President owns a golf course and hotel in Doonbeg, County Claire, Ireland. If you saw that the Irish Taoiseach Micheal Martin was at the White House last week and there appeared in headlines to be a bit of a "dust-up" as the Irish say, when talking about trade imbalances and other issues, never fear. President Trump also said the same day he "loves the Irish" and "We're always going to have that special friendship." The President added, "The bond between our nations is as old as our country itself." And in a separate breakfast for the Irish leader hosted by Vice-President J.D. Vance last Wednesday, Vance described the US-Ireland relationship as "one of the great alliances and great friendships between nations."

So, if North Dakota is going to expand its international trade, we couldn't have a better partner. Ireland shares our language, our democratic values, has a highly educated population and workforce, and shares many of our cultural and artistic passions.

It has a prominent agricultural economy, but also currently hosts nearly 1,000 American businesses operating in Ireland, with many large corporations establishing their European headquarters in Ireland due to favorable tax conditions and a skilled workforce. These companies span various sectors, including technology, pharmaceuticals, and finance. And what a trading partner Ireland makes. You get a 3-for-one special if you have a trade commission with Ireland: access to the Republic of Ireland, access to Northern Ireland, a British partner, and access to the European Union, of which Ireland is a member.

Even beyond the benefits of traditional trade opportunities, this commission could open expanded mutual tourism, since Ireland is one of the countries most visited by Americans. It could create a plethora of academic exchange opportunities.

There's really no downside to this bill, only potential. And maybe a little Irish magic. Please give HB 1568 a "do pass" (and let's see what gold there might be at the end of this rainbow).