



Testimony
House Appropriations Committee
HOUSE BILL NO. 1380
February 2, 2021

Good morning Chairman Delzer and members of the House Appropriations Committee. I am Brian Johnson the CEO of Choice Bank and Vice Co-Chair of the Valley Prosperity Partnership (VPP), an initiative led by business executives to advance and advocate for shared strategic economic development opportunities for the Red River Valley region and for North Dakota.

The business executives who lead companies across the state of North Dakota that comprise the VPP desire to strengthen and diversify our economy. They feel that investing in research and development and workforce development are critical to insuring a robust and prosperous future for all North Dakotans. Thanks to the vision of these business leaders and to public policy leaders like yourself, the legislature will have multiple proposals to consider that seek to diversify the state's economy by investing state dollars into the research and workforce development.

HB 1380's provisions relating to an economic diversification research fund and a career and technical education support fund are right on target. My experience tells me that North Dakota faces both a need & perception challenge. We are proud of ag & oil but we are so heavily identified with these labels that it keeps outside investment away because capital can go to other places without the swings that often affect ag & oil.

I have experienced this directly while serving as the Chair of the Community Depository Institutions Advisory Council of the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Board and while raising over \$100 million to diversify our ag bank both geographically and in terms of our business lines (insurance, wealth, health benefits, Fintech space)

We need to find ways to attract outside capital, whether it is to build upon our existing economic base or by attracting new talent and ideas that are outside of ag & oil. HB 1380 can be the start and an example to accomplish both of these. Likewise, the VPP also supports House Bill No. 1141, which continues a legacy innovation fund to support technology



advancement in the state, and House Bill 1425 that will enable the state investment board to allocate funding to qualified investment firms and financial institutions for the purpose of making fixed income investments and equity investments within the state.

The VPP also believes that career workforce academies offer the specialized training that is urgently needed by employers throughout North Dakota. They will expand career and technical education and training that focuses on career pathway programs that align with industry growth clusters with the highest potential for creating growth and shared prosperity.

Thank you for your consideration of these important investments in research that will lead to new innovations and enable the expansion of opportunity in North Dakota



The Valley Prosperity Partnership (VPP) is focused on developing a unified, shared vision for high value and sustained economic growth for all Red River Valley residents. A steering committee of private sector industry and higher education leaders, joined by economic development partners, work to advance strategic economic development opportunities for the Red River Valley region of North Dakota and Minnesota and for the entire State of North Dakota.

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STRENGTHENING AND DIVERSIFYING NORTH DAKOTA'S ECONOMY BY INVESTING IN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

