



NORTH DAKOTA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony in Support of HB 1477

Before the House Transportation Committee

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

It's good to be before the House Transportation Committee! I bring House Bill 1477 before you today to help make our roadways safer.

For years, I've noticed an interesting phenomenon—an increasing propensity for some drivers to drive on the left side of the road, on a four-lane highway, for no apparent reason but that they seem to prefer that lane of traffic or because it is less crowded.

This intriguing practice, of course, creates confusion, congestion, and other traffic problems and also becomes a safety hazard in many situations. Interestingly, I've noticed that, in eastern North Dakota, Minnesota drivers seem to have a greater propensity for this habit than North Dakota drivers. If you even drive to Minneapolis, on the interstate highway, you'll notice that it gets progressively worse as you near the Twin Cities. In North Dakota, this problem has worsened in recent years and it is now common on our interstate highways, as well.

Interestingly, legislators in our neighboring state, to the east, must have realized the problem among their constituents, as well, as legislation mirroring House Bill 1477 was recently passed in Minnesota. I believe that its time that we clarify our law, as well, so that drivers are more aware of what were once the common rules of the road—that the left lane on a four lane highway is reserved for faster traffic, where congestion exists, and for passing, on the open road.

To illustrate the problem, even during this legislative session, after introducing this bill, I've encountered this phenomenon on more than one occasion, traveling back and forth from Bismarck to West Fargo, on weekends. On one particular, recent occasion, a driver persisted, for nearly an hour during which the vehicle was within my view, driving constantly in the left lane, at a speed below the speed limit. Several times, cars approached from behind, often because they had passed other vehicles, but the vehicle refused to move into the right lane, causing all traffic to slow significantly, until the approaching vehicles finally gave up on the rules of the road and passed in the right lane. This, of course, can cause more problems and can be a safety issue, as well. By the way, I have the license number, if you'd like it...and they were North Dakota plates!

Of course, questions will arise concerning exceptions and circumstances where this general rule should not apply. I agree that such exceptions exist and I believe that the bill addresses these very well.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I urge you to give House Bill 1477 a strong "Do Pass" recommendation and I'd be glad to attempt to answer any questions you may have.