

1 HB2215 – Relating to Teacher Negotiations

2 Mandan Public Schools – Mike Bitz

3 Good morning Chairman Schaible and members of the Senate Education Committee. For the  
4 record, my name is Mike Bitz. I am fortunate to serve as the superintendent for Mandan Public  
5 Schools. I am here today in support of SB 2215. I will be brief.

6 I don't often look to the government to solve problems, but SB 2215 is needed legislation. As the  
7 teacher negotiation law is currently written there is no incentive for teachers to reach an agreement  
8 in a timely matter. This has the potential to put school district in a bind, because contracts cannot  
9 be issued without an agreement. Until contracts are signed, districts have no idea which teachers  
10 are returning, and which teachers are not. Let me explain the problem, a few years ago, a science  
11 teacher in Mandan accepted a job working in the oil fields for the summer. When negotiations  
12 wrapped up in July of that year, contracts were issued. This teacher chose to wait until the contract  
13 offer expired and forfeited his continuing contract rights. This left Mandan to try to find a qualified  
14 science teacher in August with the school year just weeks away. This put the school district in a  
15 difficult position. Letting negotiations drag on for months is not what is best for North Dakota  
16 students.

17 Nobody wants to go to impasse. In 27 years as a school administrator, I have never been to  
18 impasse. I don't believe that if this legislation is enacted into law that it will result in more district  
19 going to impasse. Assuming the legislature meets the full 80 days it is entitled to meet, school  
20 boards and teachers would still have 31 full days to come to an agreement. Having a deadline will  
21 not change what the eventual agreement will look like, it will just force both parties to negotiate  
22 with a sense of urgency. If the parties are close, they can agree to extend the deadline. If they are  
23 not close additional time is unlikely to help.

24 I urge you to give HB 2215 a DO PASS recommendation. I would be happy to stand for any  
25 questions.