

SENATE GOVERNMENT & VETERAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Senator Shawn Vedda, Chairman

House Bill 1253

April 8, 2021

Chairman Vedda and Members of the Committee.

I am Janelle Olson. I live in Williston with my husband, Jeff, where we have both recently retired from careers in human services and medicine.

I grew up on a farm northwest of Williston and am the youngest of four daughters. Three of the four of us have a degenerative eye condition called Cone Rod Dystrophy, which caused the deterioration of our retinas, with the onset at about the age of eight. I have been legally blind for most of my life. Reading the print before you on this page has been impossible for me to do since my early teens.

One of my earliest grade school memories is my parents and my friend's parents coming in and out of our country school building on a designated day. Their collective mood to me as a child seemed to be solemn and serious. I was given the impression that whatever they were doing was important. I would learn they were coming to the school to cast their vote. It was my parents who instilled in me my civic duty to exercise my right and responsibility to vote and I take this very seriously and have passed this on to our son.

The election in 2006 was my Independence Day. For all the years I had voted prior, this was the first time I was afforded the right to cast a secret ballot using the AutoMARK, an accessible voting machine. Before, I had to take someone with me (usually my husband) or have the ballot read to me and marked by two judges, one from each political party. One read the candidates and one marked my ballot.

It will always be my first preference to vote in person using the accessible voting machine. I feel an enormous sense of satisfaction as I am putting my ballot into the counter knowing I and I alone know how I voted.

Due to COVID-19, in the 2020 election, Jeff and I requested absentee ballots. As we sat in our home, Jeff reading and marking my ballot, the years on the calendar had once again returned to the day where my vote was no longer mine and mine alone.

I urge you to pass House Bill 1253 with the amendments. Its passage will afford me my right as a citizen to a private vote.