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HOUSE POLITICAL SUBS COMMITTEE
REPRESENTATIVE DON LONGMUIR, CHAIR

HOUSE BILL 1529
FEBRUARY 10, 2023

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BY

MICHAEL HOWE, SECRETARY OF STATE

Chairman Longmuir and members of the committee, for the record, I am Michael Howe, North Dakota Secretary of State.

Our office is currently tracking 41 bills related to elections. Of that number, 27 percent or 11 bills are campaign finance related. House Bill 1529 is one of these bills and attempts to establish filing requirements like those required of PACs plus some additional reporting for all receiving campaign funding.

Our office is not against transparency and prides itself on working with the legislature, as well as the public, on providing a transparent system that shows who is funding and influencing candidates, political parties, and measure campaigns. However, we believe much of the language in this bill will create greater confusion and is creating inconsistencies in the statute. For example:

- Page 4, Lines 8-15 – adds expenditures separated into categories to the year-end report, which contradicts Page 3, Line 22 – which crosses off the expenditure categories requirement.
- Page 5, Line 9 – removes the statewide political party from reporting, but then on Page 6, Line 29 – it includes statewide political parties in the reporting requirements.
- Page 9, Lines 17-21, and 22-23 – all ask for the same information.

Due to the numerous bills this session that examine campaign finance laws, we encourage the legislative assembly to consider an interim study to look at North Dakota's campaign finance laws and systems. If all of them were to pass, it would create a ball of wires within Century Code and our system that would be impossible to enforce and a burden to implement with our technology.

We were glad to see the appropriation in Section 5, however \$20,000 will not meet the needs this legislation creates. We have made a \$750,000 request to support new campaign finance software in SB 2002. But if that request isn't appropriated, we would be unable to implement or enforce this proposed legislation. The study would ensure that whatever changes are considered are adequately scoped in our preparation for a new system.

Chairman Longmuir, members of the committee, I urge you to consider amending this bill into an interim study that looks at our campaign finance laws.