

March 16, 2023

RE: HB 1508.

To whom it may concern

I am writing in opposition to HB 1508. I have followed the path of this bill since the beginning of this legislative session. To say it is a disheartening and disappointing to watch the bill sponsors actions is an understatement. As someone who has not paid enough attention to the legislature in action in the past, this bill's path has been an eye opener. To clarify, this bill had to have the majority of the amendments removed in order to pass the house, then the sponsors is allowed to put these amendments back in place once again, these amendments make the bill two completely different bills.

First off to address Ms O'Brien's statement that this bill is not an attack on the auditor's office is disingenuous, if her intention with this bill and specifically the amendments she authored was to enhance the office why did she not reach out to the auditor herself. Instead she offers up a low level employees excuse in response to the meeting requests of the auditors office. "the email was in my junk filter" is something one would expect to hear from a college intern, the modern day equivalent of the "dog ate my homework".

Another thing this bill's amendments seem to forget, and it seems many legislators have forgotten, the auditor is an elected position, so the office works for the people. His reports are the people's reports. This leads me to direct criticism of a few of the amendments, can the legislators clarify what is "secret information". I hope this is not the Dept of Commerce sending moneys to out of state vendors outside of the procurement procedures, this seems like an action the auditors office is intended to thwart. Knowing there is information that elected officials believe to be secret, and the public is not privy to only reinforces the need for the auditors office in the first place. I have heard many attacks that the auditor has made personal attacks and made public information that is damaging to public officials in numerous media appearances. I find this statement whole heartedly false. I listen to a lot of the auditors appearances and find him to be frustratingly unwilling to say any official has been performed their jobs, or done something illegal. Even when his audit reports have shown such activity has taken place. It does not go unnoticed that the majority of the public officials that are in support of these amendments have been found through an audit to have been deficient at their job and/or negligent. As for the costs of these audits, the general public realizes you are discussing which budget line you are putting our money in anyways. As for letting private sector firms perform these audits, I believe the audit of the Williston school district has glaringly shown that is not the best answer. The public needs a public official watchdog who works for them. A private sector auditing firm works for the people that hire them, the government entity that hired them. The last little caveat that was added, allowing the governor to appoint a special auditor comes across as nothing more than a power grab and a way to circumvent the auditors office, and does not instill trust in the public. The CPA requirement is a moot point, if the public wants to elect a streetsweeper, we can. I agreed having a CPA in the office, which there are 18 presently, look at the financial audits is not an acceptable idea.

I believe a Do NOT Pass on 1508 offers this legislative body an opportunity to start to regain some trust in the government. It will show that the legislators and executive branch are not looking for a way to avoid accountability and transparency. I believe a DO NOT PASS will be the best way to claw back some credibility, at worst passing the bill as it was passed in the house is a minor step in the right direction.

Thank you,
Brad Miller.