

March 3, 2025

SB 2035

House Education Committee

Subject: Vote NO on Senate Bill 2035-PROTECT WILLISTON'S GROWTH AND TOURISM

I am writing to urge you to vote NO on SENATE BILL 2035, which would negatively impact Williston and communities across North Dakota by limiting funding for critical tourism-driven projects. While the Senate passed the bill 27-20, I STRONGLY encourage you to consider the long-term consequences of this bill as it moves to the House Education Committee on March 5 at 9:30 AM.

As you all know, charitable gaming revenue plays a vital role in funding tourism and economic development projects in communities like Williston. The removal of "tourism" from the language defining public-spirited organizations raises serious concerns about future funding eligibility, stability, and the ability of organizations like our Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) to continue their work.

This matters to Williston and North Dakota. Williston is home to some of the most successful and well-run events in the state, thanks in large part to the funding provided by charitable gaming. Our CVB has granted thousands of dollars to support major community projects that bring people to our city.

This includes the Coyote Clay Target League (USA Clay Target League) which I started in 2018 with 34 athletes. We then had to relocate our range in 2020 due to the growth of the city. We relocated to property that had no trap range, so we had to build from the ground up. We currently are the largest league in the Nation and have over 150 athletes shooting both high school and college, we have brought state and national recognition to our town as we were the College National Champions and placed third in the Nation in 2024!

I mention this because a great deal of funding to build this premier range consisting of a beautiful clubhouse, 11 trap houses and 4 skeet fields, came from the CVB and their gaming funds. Their funding gave us the boost to put us on target with our construction and all of this took place in just two years! I am struggling to try figure out who would want to impede our progress and the progress of our town by voting for this bill?

Our facility attracts athletes and others from Ray, Tioga, Watford City, Alexander, Trenton and even Crane, Montana. All of them come several times a week in spring, fall and summer to shoot on our range. Our league will continue to bring people to our town with tournaments, league and benefit shoots to help promote Williston.

Williston has hosted several Babe Ruth World Series in the past. We have another one coming up in 2026. We are recognized as one of the best host cities in the nation, which is why we are invited to host the event almost every four years. Again, the CVB has played a major role in bringing this to Williston which draws thousands of people for the week long tournament. This is a huge event to show people across the country what a great community Williston is and how passionate we are about everything we do.

The CVB has helped our Hockey club, basketball and baseball programs, our shooting sports, as well as the ND Rodeo shoots, all of which bring visitors to our town and generate business for local hotels, restaurants and shops.

These events don't happen without dedicated funding and local investment. Without reliable tourism funding, Long-term planning for events and infrastructure projects will become uncertain, hurting Williston's ability to compete with other cities across the state and region. It already is difficult for Williston to draw people from other parts of the state because of our location.

North Dakota has thrived because of the Bakken and oil industry in our area. Gaming funds generate a substantial amount of money that is reinvested directly into our communities. Senate Bill 2035 could limit the ability for the CVB to operate gaming of which these funds are generated and which would restrict our ability to use them where they are needed most. These community organizations knows where the money is needed---and they have proven that with what they have done already to enhance the quality of life.

I urge you all to please vote NO on Senate Bill 2035.

Please stand with Williston and other cities across the state by preserving funding that strengthens our economy and tourism industry.

Penny Lee Slagle

Head Coach/President

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