

I oppose this bill.

The purpose of this bill is to destroy grass roots involvement in the political process, and to destroy political parties.

It dramatically increases the costs of becoming a political candidate in several ways.

Firstly, it directly increases the costs for a candidate to appear on a ballot.

Secondly, it removes the thrust of party support from behind a candidate.

Finally, it transforms the election process to favor the candidate who can independently raise and spend the largest amount of money.

It also intends to make political parties irrelevant, which will be a tremendous disservice to voters.

Political parties are voluntary associations of like minded individuals. A political party can be thought of as a "brand", or something like an ingredients label on a food package. A political party endorsement communicates, "If you vote for this party's candidate, this is what you can expect". Each political party has a vested interest in building and maintaining the reputation of their brand.

The volunteers of the party do the difficult work of identifying and vetting great candidates who will represent that party's brand well, and rally the support of the party members to help propel that candidate to electoral victory.

The majority of voters expect that when a candidate carries a party's brand next to their name on the ballot, that that candidate has been vetted by the keepers and owners of that brand, which is the party, not the individual candidate.

This bill would change all that. It completely removes the relevancy and involvement of political parties in shaping, curating, and furthering their own brands, and deciding which candidates should carry their brand to the voters. The intent of this bill is to enable trademark infringement on election day; to perpetuate a fraud upon the voters of North Dakota.

This bill does not increase participation or transparency in the political process. It will not make elections cheaper or more fair.

Anyone who wishes to appear on a ballot today can already do so, as an independent candidate. As an aside, I would support making it even easier for independent candidates to appear on ballots, to give voters more choices. But that's not what this bill does. What this bill attempts to do is to make it so that wealthy candidates can lie about who they are by falsely using another party's brand.

There is no other situation in law or culture where we allow someone to falsely represent themselves as the leader or spokesperson of an organization that didn't choose them. In fact, for many professions, pretending to be a representative of an organization that didn't authorize you is a crime. Lying about being a police officer is a crime called "impersonating an officer". Pretending to be a veteran is a crime, and we have laws like the Stolen Valor Act to punish the cowards who do this. Pretending to be a lawyer is a crime, and real lawyers display their law credentials in their offices. Pretending to be a doctor is a crime, and real doctors display their medical credentials in their offices.

This bill wants a different set of rules for wealthy politicians.

The government has rightly said that most people and most professions should not lie to the public about who they are. Let's extend that to our politicians too. I hope the committee will agree that lying is not in the public interest, and will recommend a "DO NOT PASS" on this bill.