

February 7, 2025

Government and Veterans Affairs Committee
North Dakota House of Representatives
State Capitol, Bismarck, ND

Re: HB 1446 (eliminating political party endorsements)

Chairman Schauer and Committee Members,

My name is Robert Harms. I've been a lawyer for 40 years, have been involved in ND politics since 1986, have attended dozens of conventions, have served as treasurer, and chairman of the Republican Party. I am concerned that HB 1446 will dismantle our political process, and hurt our state's culture, public policy and our long-term wellbeing. I OPPOSE HB 1446.

My former boss, Ed Schafer would always say "solve the problem---solve the problem". We often address symptoms, but don't solve the problem (for lack of understanding, courage, or political will). What problem generated HB 1446?

The bill is the result of political discord and animosity at endorsing conventions in the Republican Party. We see gamesmanship, rule changes, lock-outs, refusal to admit party members whose dues weren't paid on time etc. I'll give you some actual examples:

1. 2024 NDGOP convention delegates "spoiled" ballots intentionally (twice) disrupting the endorsement process (and 2000 attendees). The most popular candidate then withdrew and won the primary.
2. 10 years ago, when I was Chairman, a District refused to follow ND law, NDGOP bylaws and even their own bylaws in running their endorsing convention. A new candidate (favored by the District Chair) then ousted an incumbent legislator.
3. Recently a candidate in my district asked for the bylaws; they were not provided; he couldn't seek the party endorsement because he hadn't given notice as required by the bylaws! Another candidate was endorsed and then elected.

We've had district chairman tell legislators to not attend endorsing conventions. North Dakota people won't attend district meetings because of the toxicity that permeates many them. These shenanigans produced HB 1446. But, it doesn't solve the problem.

My concerns about HB 1446:

1. The **erosion of our political processes and political parties** so less people will participate in state and district political activities. We will have less adherence to and teaching of core values. State and district parties will have little purpose/value.
2. The **primary election will be a free-for-all**, without a party endorsement, dominated by the wealthy. Political campaigns will continue to devolve and center on negative advertising, flooding our mailboxes with nasty mailers, and such rather

than debate ideas and policies for the people of North Dakota. Those who spend will be those who win (not always the best outcome). The primary doesn't always produce the best result. Recall 80% of North Dakota voters stayed home in 2024! (And we approved an unconstitutional age restriction on congressional candidates).

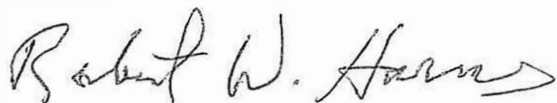
3. **Loss of political education:** political thought and analysis, the principles that evolve through the social functions of the districts are important to an orderly society. The district organizations teach and foster political discourse. We learn about our government through political engagement which is foundational to the functioning of our state and country. All of this will be lost with HB 1446.

Dismantling our state parties and processes hurts all of us. We should create structures and processes and policies that ENCOURAGE political engagement, and opportunity. We are supposed to believe in free speech and debate, and assembly and participation and the competition of ideas that will produce more well-informed citizens and a stronger, more vibrant society in North Dakota. HB 1446 will run counter to all of that by thrusting us into a free-for-all primary election without any party endorsement to assist the voter.

We DO have a problem in our political endorsement process. Here is what would be more helpful in addressing the gamesmanship I described earlier. Please ask the Legislative Council to develop the following points as a hog-house amendment to HB 1446.

- **Bylaws-----require uniform bylaws developed by each state party**
- **All bylaws to be published on state party website, available to anyone**
- **Districts may add to bylaws but cannot conflict with state party bylaws**
- **Meetings for reorganization and endorsing conventions:**
 - **Require 30 days notice be published on the state party website**
- **Repeal 16.1-03-07(4) which says essentially: *The state party may not include any requirementfor the organization of district committees nor..... impose any requirement regarding district party organization....* (This district "autonomy" is part of the problem).**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, I urge you to OPPOSE HB1446, but ask you to FIX the problems we have in our political process. The above proposal will reduce the discord and encourage ND people to engage again in this process that is vital to our state's well being. I ask you to amend the bill as outlined above. Thank you.



Robert W. Harms
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