



Do Not Pass Testimony on HB 1446

Sandra Sanford, Chairwoman
NDGOP

Chairman Schauer & Members of the House Government and Veterans Affairs Committee.

My name is Sandra Sanford, Chairwoman of the North Dakota Republican Party. I am here on behalf of the Republican Party and its membership.

The North Dakota Republican Party was established in 1889—the same year as statehood. Our endorsement process served the People of North Dakota as a cornerstone of our democratic process for over 100 years.

Political parties exist to put forward candidates who support their party's platform and values by way of the endorsement process. Of course, you all know this as all of you were part of the endorsement process in your own districts.

House Bill 1446 would remove the party's right to place our candidate of choice on the ballot. Instead, it would require all candidates to seek ballot access by collecting signatures.

Today, all ND candidates currently have two methods to get on the ballot.

1. A candidate can seek party endorsement for ballot access, OR
2. a candidate can collect petition signatures.

House Bill 1446 maintains one path to the ballot while eliminating the path that most Republicans and ALL Democrats used to reach the voters last election. This bill compromises the rights of the public to free association and undermines the rights of political parties to choose their own candidates.

The NDGOP facilitates opportunities to get to know candidates and a competitive, democratic process to endorse them. This function serves to vet candidates under the scrutiny of a group.

Without party vetting, the party is just a name. Less-informed petition signers will advance candidates who they might be meeting for the very first time. Voters will have no meaningful assurance whether a candidate is Republican or Democratic.

Judicial precedent has repeatedly upheld state parties' rights to choose their own candidates. This bill is sure to invite litigation.

Killing party-led ballot access would favor candidates with more time, money, or name recognition while discouraging political newcomers. It also unfairly burdens rural candidates.

With our first round of term limits looming, this chamber cannot afford to experiment with sweeping changes that undermine our most treasured civic institutions. It also makes the process for party-backed candidates unnecessarily difficult and removes any ability for parties to ensure their nominees align with their principles.

HB 1446 is a big-government overreach that weakens the People's right to freely associate. Our nation's founders assured us the right to organize and influence our government. After 225 years, why would Republicans in North Dakota work to undermine this democratic function and limit our methods to get on the ballot?

To conclude, our endorsement process isn't broken. Candidates can already reach the ballot by petition.

Not every Republican will favor every candidate we endorse, but the public has enjoyed this right since our State's founding. Taking it away now would make our elections less democratic.