

Testimony: Bill 2407 - Military Gallery

Special Session of the North Dakota Legislative Assembly

Dale Lennon, Executive Director

State Historical Society of North Dakota Foundation

Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Dale Lennon, and I serve as Executive Director of the State Historical Society of North Dakota Foundation.

I want to briefly explain the Foundation's role in the Military Gallery project, the work we have undertaken in support of it, and why we remain committed to seeing this project move forward.

From the beginning, my Board of Directors recognized the importance of this project and issued a declaration of **conceptual support** for the Military Gallery. That support reflected our belief that preserving and telling the stories of North Dakotans who have served our country is consistent with the mission of our Foundation and the State Historical Society.

The Foundation is a nonprofit organization, but our role extends well beyond fundraising. We have been given the responsibility of establishing and maintaining relationships with the donors who support the State Historical Society and its mission.

That responsibility includes the major donors who helped make the **2014 expansion of the Heritage Center** possible, and it will include the major donors supporting this expansion and the Military Gallery. It also includes the individuals and families whose donations and membership dues sustain the Foundation and allow us to continue our work.

Because of that responsibility, I felt it was important for the Foundation to be represented throughout each phase of the Military Gallery project. I have served on both the Joint Military Museum Advisory Committee, or JMMAC, and its Executive Committee. My participation has allowed me to understand how the project has developed, the commitments being made to donors, and the vision for what the Military Gallery will ultimately become.

That involvement becomes especially important after the project is completed. The Foundation will help facilitate the long-term relationships with those who have invested in this project through **Naming Rights agreements, donor recognition, stewardship, and ongoing communication.**

For the Foundation, receiving a gift is not the end of the relationship - it is the beginning of one. Our responsibility is to make sure those who invest in North Dakota's history remain connected to the impact of their generosity.

Our involvement has also extended beyond fundraising.

This past spring, the Foundation conducted a statewide Military Gallery Caravan. We made **48 stops across North Dakota**, working with legislators and community leaders to schedule at least two stops within each legislative district.

The purpose was to take the story of the Military Gallery directly to the people of North Dakota—to explain the project, create awareness, hear from veterans and communities, and build support.

Attendance varied considerably from stop to stop. Some gatherings were well attended; others were not. But the media coverage generated by the Caravan was consistently positive and helped us reach far more people than those who attended the individual events.

It was an ambitious effort, and it reinforced something we already knew: **building awareness and private support for a project of this magnitude takes time.**

The fundraising campaign remains a work in progress.

I am here to assure you that the **State Historical Society of North Dakota Foundation remains committed to doing its part.**

I remain committed to working with the State Historical Society, the North Dakota National Guard Foundation, our fundraising partners, our donors, veterans, communities, and the Legislature.

I also recognize that the decisions made during this special session will provide important direction for all of us as we determine the next steps.

Ultimately, the Military Gallery is about more than a building.

It is about preserving the stories of North Dakotans who served, honoring their sacrifices, and making certain those stories are available to generations who will never have the opportunity to hear them firsthand.

The Foundation believed in that purpose when our Board offered its conceptual support at the beginning of this project.

We believe in that purpose today.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your consideration of the future of the Military Gallery project.