

Representative Longmuir and Committee Members,

I am Rev. Deborah Blood and I serve as Conference Minister for the Northern Plains Conference, United Church of Christ, providing leadership, support, oversight and guidance to our congregations and pastors. Our Conference includes congregations in all parts of North Dakota, from Grand Forks to Scranton, from Minot to Hankinson, from Dickinson to Fargo and many places in between. We are rural and urban, conservative and liberal, large and small congregations. I submit this testimony In Opposition to HCR 3020, and as an Ordained Christian pastor, I urge a "Do Not Pass" on that bill.

Our country was founded by people seeking religious freedom. The United States Constitution guarantees the Free Exercise of Religion, and prohibits governments from establishing any religion. This is a founding principle of our nation. HCR 3020 is in direct violation of these well-established Constitutional provisions, as it seeks to codify one aspect of some Christian theologies. Our government has no business dabbling in theology. Leave that to the people who preach and practice their faith.

As Christians, we are bound to Christ, not by citizenship, but by faith. We believe that patriotism does not require us to minimize our religious convictions. One of our faith commitments is that government should not prefer one religion over another or religion over nonreligion. Religious instruction is best left to our houses of worship, other religious institutions and families.

We love our communities and are grateful that America's historic commitment to religious pluralism enables faith communities to live in civic harmony with one another without sacrificing our theological convictions.

We also believe that conflating religious authority with political authority is idolatrous and often leads to oppression of minority and other marginalized groups as well as the spiritual impoverishment of religion.

Whether we worship at a church, mosque, synagogue, or temple, America has no second-class faiths. All are equal under the U.S. Constitution.

As Christians in the Congregational and Evangelical/Reformed traditions, including Germans from Russia, we do not need or want the government to tell us what we should believe, nor do we want others told what they should believe.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue and for your good work on behalf of the people of North Dakota.

I strongly urge a Do Not Pass on HCR 3020.

In Christ, Rev. Deborah J. Blood, Conference Minister