

**Good morning, Chairman Patten and members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee,**

For the record, I'm Greg Kessel, State Senator from District 39.

Thank you for the opportunity to present **Senate Bill 2339**, a bill that prioritizes public safety by addressing wildfire risks and ensuring utilities develop and implement effective Wildfire Mitigation Plans, or WMPs.

This past fall, North Dakota experienced firsthand the devastating impact of wildfires. Over 100,000 acres were burned. A stark reminder that wildfire risk is not limited to other states or distant regions. It is a very real and pressing issue, right here in North Dakota.

**Safety is job number one.** SB 2339 ensures that utilities can take proactive steps to mitigate wildfire risks through comprehensive Wildfire Mitigation Plans. These plans focus on situational awareness, infrastructure resilience, and public outreach to ensure both prepared utilities and public safety. By codifying these measures, this bill not only enhances public safety, but also **preserves the financial stability of our utilities**, helping to protect ratepayers, the citizen's of North Dakota, from the long-term costs of wildfire-related liabilities.

This legislation offers a proactive and balanced approach to protecting our communities, ensuring safe, reliable, and affordable energy services. It reflects our shared commitment to public safety and economic resilience.

I urge the committee to support SB 2339 **(with the amendment I've passed out)** and I look forward to hearing from the supporters that will follow my testimony on how SB 2339 will help prevent and mitigate future wildfires.

**Thank you, Mr. Chairman.**