

Dear Committee Members,

Because the North Dakota legislative branch was in its off year when the pandemic hit, lawmakers were unable to represent citizens by weighing in on what the response to the virus should entail. Executive orders were decreed with no specified end date, and there were no parameters to inform citizens when, how, and why the state of emergency would end. Flood waters recede, and there is clear evidence of when it's time to rebuild, but who gets to decide what constitutes an emergency regarding a virus that will likely never go completely away?

Not only did the arbitrary and draconian nature of the executive orders undermine legitimate concerns of Covid-19, but it caused great financial, emotional, and mental harm to thousands of North Dakotans. Throughout the last year, we forced small businesses, restaurants, bars, and salons to make significant financial sacrifices, kept families away from dying loved ones, imprisoned the elderly in long-term care facilities, kept kids out of school and extracurricular activities to the detriment of their mental health, forced adults and children to wear useless pieces of cloth over their faces, and even informed citizens how many people we should invite into our homes over the holidays. And the executive office did all of these things based on inaccurate data provided by unelected public health officials and without the input and consent of the citizens.

North Dakotans need to know that their voices matter even during a state of emergency. We need to know that our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness will be protected from future executive orders that seek to micromanage citizens' lives in the name of safety. There is a current trend in government to declare an emergency, whether it is related to climate, guns, white supremacy, or COVID-19, in order to implement extremist policies and/or to justify spending obscene amounts of taxpayer dollars. There should be more input and discussion surrounding what constitutes a state of emergency, not less. And that input should be as local as possible, not from global organizations like the World Health Organization or from out-of-state billionaires with agendas.

The response to the pandemic highlighted the clear need for legislation that would protect the balance of power among the branches of government, particularly with regard to current and future state emergency declarations.

Please render a DO PASS on HB 1118.

Thank you for your leadership and service to the state of North Dakota.

