

Chairman Dale Patton, Vice Chairman Jeffery J. Magnum, and respected Senators: As a lifetime resident of district 4B, current tournament chair and multi-year tournament fisherman, I respectfully ask that you support HB 1538 with a do-pass out of committee. I took over as co-chair for a small, 40 team, fishing tournament held on Lake Sakakawea in 2020. In permitting our tournament for that year, as well as the following years of 2021 and 2022, I became accustomed to the process needed to ensure a fair balance of angler's vs fishing pressure vs access location pressure. I believe that the permit process is a necessary feature to ensure all of the above components of a fishing tournament can be done with respect to all parties involved, whether directly or indirectly. With that said, I want to emphasize that my only issue with HB1538 stands with the conservation fee. When the permit process changed in regard to the elimination of the cap in fees for the 2021 tournament season, it left me wondering what the fuss was about. The fees to run the small 40 team tournament I am a part of stayed the same but the stand-out words as to the reasoning for the elimination of the cap were always "it makes it fair across the board". It left me trying to understand how if 10% was already being charged to all tournaments, why it should be so grossly expanded with the lack of the cap. At some point, our leaders felt that there should be a cap so as not to make it so abhorrent, and as I will explain, rightfully so. To make it "fair" meant that we became the only state in the union to grossly punish our tournament fisherman as the sole funding for this conservation fee, and not by just a small dollar amount, we took it to a level that was nearly a crime compared to other states. I have however, continued to follow policy, and have earmarked our tournament "conservation fees" to go to the location that supports us for our event. This "conservation fee" money is removed from the payout structure for the hard working, blue collar, industry individuals who fish this tournament as a way to get together with old and new friends, spend time around a campfire or a good grilled steak, and yes, put a little skin in the game for some good natured ribbing over who caught the biggest, or most fish in the event. These men and women give their hearts to the backbones of our state infrastructure in the best and worst of conditions, just to have 10% of their entry fee get given to the state for trying to take a break from life for a long weekend in a beautiful ND destination. Yet somehow other events in the outdoors of our beautiful state get left untouched by the "conservation fee" even though they are waging money against our resources as well. Our big buck, big doe, pheasant tail and coyote events stand largely untouched and I'm sure there are other events that could be drawn out as well! As a tournament fisherman, I have spent the last decade of my life honing my skills trying to feed the strengthening desire to compete in walleye tournaments against some of the best in the field. My desire to do this shouldn't come at a cost that is any different to any other sports in the world, whether it be basketball, football, golf or even chess. I spend my hard-earned money on the equipment needed to compete, much the same as a basketball player buys his shoes, or a golfer does on his clubs. These expenditures never seem to stop with the advancements in tackle, lures, rods, electronics and even gas and boats themselves. My dollars spent on these items over the course of a year are in the thousands and these dollars go to support the small rural locations in which I fish. These recreational dollars provide a significant, unplanned boost to the local economy in the areas I frequent, and that is just one person making a small difference. I have traveled for my tournaments, spending time at resorts or motels, buying bait or tackle at many different locations. Now if you take that 1 person, and you make a full field of tournament fisherman out of him, those dollars now become exponentially substantial. A large tournament moving into a community for a week to 10 days while pre-fishing (practicing as they say) and fishing the tournament now has made a difference for businesses in that community. It was dollars that they didn't have the ability to budget for, as when they were planning their income around current events for the next fiscal year, they didn't know that at the same time, a tournament was in the permit process with the ND Game and Fish to be able to come to their location. It isn't until late spring, when these tournaments release their schedules for the coming year that they find out that they are the lucky recipients of this "boost". One often missed fact of these boosts, is that it often impacts locations that don't benefit from other events in the community, it is often the "off main street" businesses that get a chance at their piece of the pie that they have missed out on from a "main street" event held earlier in the year. I want to end this with a small paragraph making this bill about me. The friends I have met in tournament fishing, as well as the knowledge I have gained from participating in national events is priceless to me. These are major boosters of confidence and knowledge that can't otherwise be replicated. Since the elimination of the fee cap, these events have avoided our state thus depriving me of the ability to test my skills at an elevated level. It has taken my drive away from me because I don't feel that it is fair that when Mr. Powers says on record that "it's not about the money" while referring to the conservation fees, I get punished fiscally and mentally on my ability to represent my home in my own backyard. Thank you for your time and consideration towards a do pass on HB1538!