



North Dakota House of Representatives

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COMMITTEES:

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Chairman Wanzek and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, For the record, my name is Landon Bahl, and I have the honor of representing the citizens of District 17 in the North Dakota House of Representatives.

I stand before you today to introduce House Bill 1408, which proposes transitioning the North Dakota Legislature to annual sessions beginning in 2027. This bill takes a proactive approach to modernizing our legislative process while preserving the integrity of our existing framework.

Key Provisions of House Bill 1408:

- Results in a fiscal note reduction for the biennium. I am not sure how many bonus points this should give me, but today your job on this bill should be simple with no appropriation needed. However, I will continue to discuss the policy part of this bill as I know some of you may be interested in learning more about this approach.
- Maintains the 80-day legislative limit, this bill does not increase total session days but instead distributes them more effectively over two years, we are not changing the constitution.
- Shifts the legislature to annual sessions starting in 2027.
- Limits each year's session to 70 calendar days, with adjournment likely by early March.
- Provides flexibility in structuring sessions under the jurisdiction of legislative management per the amendment passed out with my testimony.

Broader Positive Impacts of House Bill 1408:

- Enhances fiscal and economic responsiveness by allowing more timely decision-making.
- Addresses the challenges of term limits by helping legislators gain experience more efficiently, ensuring continuity of governance.
- Strengthens the legislative branch to ensure it remains an equal branch of government, which would further preserve institutional knowledge and improve policymaking.
- Improves interim committee effectiveness through enhanced research, analysis, and public engagement, leading to more well-developed and thoroughly vetted policies.
- Attracts high-quality legislative candidates by making public service more accessible. Annual sessions would allow more North Dakotans, especially those unable to commit to four months at a time to serve, fostering a more experienced, diverse, and representative legislature.
 - To further underscore the importance of the statement I just made and how important it is to get well qualified and diverse individuals in the legislature, here are a few facts about our legislative assembly makeup today:
 - 60% of the legislative assembly can be classified into as little as three groups in terms of occupation, the first one in this grouping being farmer and ranchers, the second one being self employed and the largest in this group being retirees.

House Bill is another annual sessions bill however it may be the right one at the right time. The citizens voted for term limits and we need to do our best to adjust how we do business because the impacts of term limits are in sight. We cannot sit here and wait for those impacts to begin before we take action. If this assembly does not take action, we truly are going to impact the citizens of North Dakota, and how we do business in a negative way, there is no doubt about that. You do not need to take this from me, rather look at the study performed last interim, reach out to legislative council and ask their expert thoughts, or if you are a veteran in this assembly, ask yourself. A few very interesting or, some may say alarming facts about the future of our assemblies are as follows:

- In the 70th legislative assembly, there will be a maximum of 48.94% freshmen legislators.
- In the 71st legislative assembly, there will be a minimum of 36.88% freshmen legislators, and with the potential for a maximum of 51.06% freshmen legislators in the 71st legislative assembly. This maximum would then remain the maximum for every session moving forward.

I recognize that change, especially change initiated in the House, can face resistance. That's why we brought in Senate Majority Leader Jim Mehlhaff from South Dakota to share his experience with annual sessions during the Senate Policy Committee hearing. His testimony was compelling. South Dakota has long operated with annual sessions, and they've done so with efficiency and success. I encourage each of you to view that video testimony before taking committee action on HB 1408.

Chairman Wanzek and members of the committee, House Bill 1408 strengthens our legislative process, improves decision-making, and ensures long-term efficiency in government. I urge you to support this effort to build a more effective and accountable legislature for the people of North Dakota.

Thank you for your time, and I welcome any questions.

Regards,
Landon Bahl