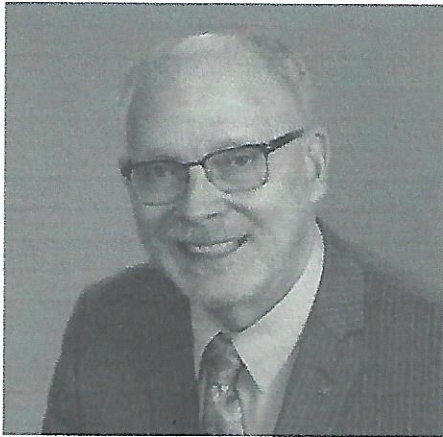


Letter From the Chair



I've been watching the ND Legislature since I returned to North Dakota after graduate school. My brother served five terms in the legislature from District 26, including several terms as assistant minority leader, so upon returning to the state, I had a natural interest in the activities of the legislature. Of the 17 sessions that I've watched, I can honestly say that this session is one of the most reactionary ones that I've ever observed. It is within this environment of a reactionary legislature, that Dakota Resource Council spokespersons are attempting to promote progressive legislation or to forestall bad legislation.

I'm not alone in my observation. Mike Jacobs, perhaps one of the most astute political observers noted: "Still, it is possible to observe that so far this has been among the most reactionary in the state's history. The label is not meant pejoratively or judgmentally, but rather descriptively. The word does catch the tone of the session. Time after time, lawmakers have pushed back against the governor particularly, but also against existing laws and sometimes against each other." (Mike Jacobs, Mar. 3, 2021, Fargo Forum) Some of the most reactionary bills came from the so-called Bastiat Caucus. Even conservative commentator Rob Port finds the activities of the members of that secretive group embarrassing. "I can understand the frustration Republicans feel about being lumped in with a secretive group of goofballs who seem less interested in governing than proposing inflammatory policies that will enhance their Facebook notoriety. But it's incumbent upon the Republicans in the Legislature fed up with the Bastiat's to do something about it." (Rob Port, Jan. 21, 2021, Fargo Forum.)

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(Haaland Confirmation Cont.)

Haaland during her confirmation hearing. Despite some senators objecting she was confirmed.

Representation, varied perspectives, and shared power is long overdue and extremely important in the halls of our federal government, and at every level of human interaction. In a tweet Haaland said, "A voice like mine has never been a Cabinet secretary or at the head of the Department of Interior. Growing up in my mother's Pueblo household made me fierce. I'll be fierce for all of us, our planet, and all of our protected land."

DRC and Fort Berthold POWER applaud Secretary Haaland's confirmation and look forward to and expect that she will better represent tribal nations and will listen to the needs of everyday tribal citizens not just tribal governments. As Lisa DeVille, co-founder of POWER said, "The nomination of Deb Haaland, an enrolled citizen of the Pueblo of Laguna in New Mexico is an important step in having Indigenous representation in decision making positions. We hope now that she has been confirmed she will look at the tribal fossil fuel programs to ensure our sacred land, air and water are protected."

(Chairperson Letter Continued)

Well, the Republicans finally did something when the behavior and speech of Luke Simons, one of the most outspoken, and despicable, members of the Bastiat Caucus, became too much for them to bear. "In an unprecedented move, the North Dakota House of Representatives has expelled embattled Rep. Luke Simons over recently surfaced sexual harassment allegations. The Republican-dominated lower chamber voted 69-25 on Thursday, March 4, to remove Simons from office after a heated three-hour debate. (Turley, Mar. 4, 202, Fargo Forum). The list of the 25 members of the ND House who voted against expulsion is the closest approximation we have of who constitutes the members of the Bastiat Caucus.

Nevertheless, the reactionary legislation that has been proposed includes include making abortion a felony, rescinding approval of the ERA, loosening restrictions on where one can carry concealed weapons, attacks on collective bargaining for public school teachers, prohibiting local governments from imposing mask mandates, directing public education funding to private schools, prohibiting transgender youth from participating in sports with the genders with which they

identify, carrying concealed weapons at sporting events, limiting who qualifies to vote absentee, increasing the residency requirement, and limiting how much time a person can spend voting at a polling site. The Bismarck Tribune editorial board noted that these restrictions were entirely unnecessary. "Supporters argue these bills will combat voter fraud and make the voting process more efficient. The Tribune editorial board believes both arguments are nonsense." (Editorial board, Jan 30, 2021, Bismarck Tribune).

As disturbing as these reactionary bills are to us as citizens, the Dakota Resource Council has focused its efforts on other reactionary bills, most noticeably legislators' desperate attempts to financially subsidize up a declining coal industry, to change zoning requirements for the siting of CAFOs, to facilitate improvements in drains while shifting the costs to non-beneficiaries of the drain, to move CAFO regulation from the Department of Environmental Quality to the Agriculture Department, to remove criminal penalties for failing to follow laws regarding drainage, to penalize sustainable energy sources while privileging oil and coal sources, to establish a Clean Sustainable Energy Authority skewed toward the oil, coal, and ethanol industries and to place certain restrictions on the creation and submission of the North Dakota Regional Haze State Implementation Plan (SIP) which would conflict with the federal Regional Haze Rule.

DRC has also supported several bills such as the net metering bill that has been advanced by Citizens Local Energy Action Network (CLEAN) in Fargo, the voluntary beef checkoff bill, a bill that would match state hemp laws to federal laws, a bill to permit sales of specialty fertilizers to nonfarmers, and a bill to promote soil health championed by one of our members.

As you can see, the staff at Dakota Resource Council has been very active in testifying during committee meetings on bills which we support or oppose. We're seldom on the prevailing side of committee recommendations or chamber decisions. Nevertheless, DRC's voice has been heard.