

Letter From the Chair



A Tale of Two Legislators

Because I was a college professor, as soon as final grades were submitted, I would examine class averages as well as individual student scores to detect trends. That habit hasn't faded. When I received the legislative scorecard compiled by DRC staff, I pored over it for patterns. On the bills where DRC supported or opposed a position, neither party in either chamber scored particularly high—no group averaged above 80%—whether overall or within the three issue areas DRC focused on: property rights, energy, and agriculture.

More surprising were the relatively small differences in average scores between House Democrats and House Republicans. The two groups scored nearly identically on property rights and energy, with Democrats performing moderately better on agriculture (+12 points). But the contrast between Senate Democrats and Senate Republicans was far more pronounced: Senate Democrats scored 24 points higher overall, and outpaced their GOP counterparts by 27 points on property rights and 31 points on agriculture.

Even when comparing Senate Democrats to House Democrats, the Senate contingent scored higher across the board: +11 overall, +20 on property rights, +6 on energy, and +15 on agriculture. So, while partisan divisions in the House were minimal, the biggest gaps appeared between chambers—particularly between
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**McKenzie County Energies &
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**Missouri Valley Resource Council
(MVRC)**

Dakota Resource Council
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(COVER STORY CONTINUED)**Top-Scoring Republicans: Breaking the Curve**

In the House, Rep. Terry Brown (District 12) stood out with a B (86%), the highest score among all Republicans. He voted with landowners on eminent domain, backed small ag, and posted a perfect score on energy issues.

Also earning a C+ (78%) were **Rep. Cole Maki** (District 10) and **Rep. Jayme Morton** (District 30), who both showed more balanced voting records that aligned with DRC priorities on energy and ag.

A handful of others—including **Reps. Zachary Henderson, Scott Heilman, Steve Osowski, Michael Rios, Karen Rohr, Cole VanWinkle**, and **Don Vigessaa**—hovered just under the B range. Notably, **Rep. VanWinkle** earned a B- (80%) and scored 86% on energy issues.

Senate Republicans: Slim Pickings

Sen. Jeff Magrum (District 8) earned a B+ (89%), making him the top-performing Senate Republican by a wide margin. He voted with DRC 100% of the time on both property rights and energy—an impressive and rare combo.

Other passable scores came from **Sens. Dean Enget, Kyle Paulson, David Van Oosting**, and **Dean Luick**, who earned C or C+ grades and showed some independence from party-line votes.

What does this mean for you?

It means DRC members and allies have work to do. Legislators respond to pressure—especially from constituents. If your rep scored low, let them hear from you. If your senator stood up for rural North Dakota, tell them thank you.

This report card isn't just about grades—it's a roadmap for organizing and a reminder that bipartisan support for landowners, small ag, and fair energy is possible.

You can view the full scorecard, broken down by legislator, issue, and grade, at drcinfo.org/legislativegrades.

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Senate Democrats and Senate Republicans.

	Overall	Property Rights	Energy	Agriculture
Senate Democrats	74	72	58	80
Senate Republicans	50	45	48	49
House Democrats	63	51	52	65
House Republicans	60	51	56	53

I also looked at how many legislators in each chamber received passing grades (70% or higher) overall and on each issue. Senate Democrats again led the pack in every category except energy. Their overall rate of passing grades far outstripped every other group.

	70%+ Overall	70%+ Property Rights	70%+ Energy	70%+ Agriculture
Senate Democrats	80%	80%	20%	100%
Senate Republicans	7%	17%	24%	7%
House Democrats	27%	0%	0%	54%
House Republicans	7%	2%	14%	45%

Curious about the most consistent supporters of DRC positions (85%+), I found a surprise: the Senate's most liberal and most conservative members—Tim Mathern (D-11) and Jeff Magrum (R-8)—each scored 89% overall.

	Property Rights	Energy	Agriculture	Overall
Tim Mathern (D)	100 (A+)	89 (B+)	90 (A)	89 (B+)
Jeff Magrum (R)	100 (A+)	100 (A+)	89 (B+)	89 (B+)
T. Brown (R-House)	83 (B)	100 (A+)	83 (B)	86
House Democrats	No one above 85%			

That both Mathern and Magrum landed on the same score—despite opposite party affiliations—felt like a conundrum. But it reflects a deeper trend. Both legislators are populists, though at opposite ends of the spectrum.

In my Winter 2024 column, *The Election and Its Meaning for DRC: A Vindication for Economic Populism Messaging and Organizing*, I wrote about how populism—whether left or right—centers the conflict between “the people” and some opposing force. For left-wing (or inclusionary) populism, that

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conflict pits the people against economic elites. For right-wing (or exclusionary) populism, it's the people vs. the elites who are seen as favoring "others"—women, immigrants, LGBTQ+ folks, academics, and government bureaucrats.

But here's the key: while these types of populism differ in diagnosis, they sometimes converge on solutions. On legislative issues DRC supported, six right-wing populists in the Senate and 17 in the House voted with us. There is common ground—particularly on issues impacting rural North Dakota.

Journalist Rob Port has written extensively on the internal populist vs. establishment battles within the NDGOP. Similar tensions—though less public—exist in the Democratic-NPL Party, especially between metro-based centrists and those pushing for a more populist economic message. A recent poll covered by Axios found that economic populist framing significantly outperformed the so-called "abundance" messaging promoted by national Democratic strategists like Ezra Klein.

At DRC, we've long embraced a progressive populism grounded in small-d democracy, local control, and opposition to corporate overreach. Our most successful campaigns have centered these values—and even when we haven't won outright, we've built collective power and momentum in rural communities by standing up to out-of-state corporate interests and the politicians who support them.

But the voting record of Democratic-NPL legislators—especially in the House—suggests a disconnect. Rooted primarily in urban districts like Fargo and Grand Forks, they've struggled to connect with rural voters on key issues like agriculture, energy, and land use. Outside a few reservation-based rural districts, D-NPL representation in rural North Dakota is nearly nonexistent.

This isn't just a partisan problem. It's about narrative—and the failure of the traditional left to build a message that resonates beyond city limits. DRC's anti-corporate, people-first framing offers a way forward—if only more in the Democratic-NPL would pick it up. We've shown that an economic populist message can resonate in rural North Dakota. The data—and our organizing experience—suggest it's time for both parties to take note.

Agriculture

Farm Aid 40 Announced in Minneapolis — DRC Will Be There



Farm Aid is headed to Minneapolis September 18–20, with an all-star concert lineup on the 20th—and DRC is attending!

Discount tickets are available for DRC members and can be reserved through August 15. Email Sam Wagner at sam@drcinfo.com with the subject line **Tickets** to reserve yours.

DRC also plans to host an interactive booth and attend the Farm Aid conference before the concert. If you'd like to be on a panel or suggest a topic, email Sam at sam@drcinfo.com with the subject line **Farm Aid Conference Ideas**.

Legislative Report — Agriculture, 2025

The 2025 North Dakota Legislative Session wrapped up in early May. Unlike 2023, there was no clear agricultural agenda—except a quiet but consistent push for deregulation and public subsidies to attract value-added ag.

DRC once again fought for cattle industry reforms, including an elected beef board. While we built momentum, the proposal fell short.

Pesticides & Corporate Power:

HB1318 passed, granting more legal immunity to pesticide companies. But it gave our members an opportunity to call out Bayer and the "Modern Ag (CONTINUED ON PAGE 5)