



from the director's chair

■ by Jon Martinson, NDSBA Executive Director

Bill Draft to Eliminate Special Elections

At the July meeting of the legislature's **Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations**, a bill draft was discussed that is of concern. The bill would eliminate special elections and instead require elections that seek voter approval of political subdivision authority to increase property taxes or increase indebtedness to be held in conjunction with a statewide primary or general election.

This is the kind of bill that makes the public scratch their head and question the motive and wisdom of some legislators. **The North Dakota School Boards Association is a strong supporter of local control.** We believe locally elected school board members are in the best position to make decisions since they

live in the community affected by their decisions. There are local checks and balances in place.

If a board member's voting record is at odds with community thinking, the board member can be replaced at the next election.

In addition to the concern about undue legislative intrusion in local affairs, this proposed bill undermines the authority of elected board members to decide whether or not to hold a special election. After all, board members know best in this situation.

The reason given for eliminating special elections is low voter turnout, but the facts don't support that opinion. Consider this: Bottineau, Garrison, Kenmare, Mott-Regent, and Tioga all held special elections for a bond measure in the past year. Some passed, some failed. However, in each case, voter turnout was HIGHER for the special election than it was for the recent June primary election—for both city commission and school board! Bismarck held its special election on September 18, 2012, to build a high school and two elementary schools. More voters turned out for the bond election (13,805) than voted in the June 2014, primary for city commission (13,074).

The public's right to vote is the foundation of democracy and voting should be made as easy as possible for citizens (absentee ballots, identification of polling locations, etc.). People ought to be encouraged to vote. Yet, apathy at polls has been an ongoing issue for many years, and frankly, it is most noticeable with school board elections. Reasons why citizens don't care enough to vote is beyond the scope of this article, but efforts to legislate people to the polls (while taking away local control) will be counterproductive. It's also counterintuitive.

Hopefully, this ill-conceived bill will die any early death in the upcoming legislative session due to excessive weight gain from bloated faulty logic and overreach by otherwise well-intentioned legislators.

bulletin

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NDSBA annual convention Convention Reminders

• Resolutions must be received in the NDSBA office no later than **4:00 on Monday, August 11.**

• If you are interested in service as a convention committee member please contact NDSBA by **August 1.**

• If you have a sleeping room reserved at the Ramkota Hotel for Friday, October 24, you need to cancel if you are not planning to stay after convention conclusion. Contact Ramkota Hotel reservations at 701-258-7700.

RENEWAL REMINDERS

NDSBA dues should be paid by July 31.

NDSBA will mail Policy Services renewal notices to school districts in July. Basic Policy Services membership is \$250 and includes access to a monthly online newsletter, 10 free sample policies upon request, and the option to participate in fee-based required and customized policy manual services.