

**2021 SENATE GOVERNMENT AND VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SCR 4015**

# 2021 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Government and Veterans Affairs Committee  
Room JW216, State Capitol

SCR 4015  
3/5/2021  
9:00 AM

**A concurrent resolution relating to election of and qualifications of the state health officer.**

**Chair Vedaa** opened the hearing at 9:00 AM with Sen Vedaa, Meyer, Elkin, K Roers, Weber, Wobbema, and Marcellais present.

## **Discussion Topics:**

- Responsibility to electors
- Four-year term beginning 2022
- Physician elected or appointed

**Sen Heitkamp – Dist 26** introduced the resolution #7532

**Courtney Koebele – ND Medical Association** – testified opposed #7487

## **Additional written testimony:**

**Renee Kuntz – Towner ND – in support #7376**

**Jocelyn Backman – West Fargo – in support #7330**

**Shari Neigum – Bismarck – in support #7322**

Adjourned at 9:12 AM

*Pam Dever, Committee Clerk*

My name is Senator Jason Heitkamp and I represent the 26<sup>th</sup> legislative district, home of the Sargent County ghost towns formally known as Hample, Nicholson, Towanda, and Dunbar.

SCR 4015 relates to election of the state health officer. This resolution allows the qualified electors of this state to elect a state health officer for a four - year term at the appropriate general election, beginning in 2022.

We have seen great power given to the State Health officer in the last year... The citizens have contacted me and told me, as their legislative representative, that it is time to change the way the Health Officer is hired. The citizens want to hire the health officer through election. The citizens want to be represented by elected officials who listen to them and can be held responsible to them. The citizens want to vet them and hire them during an election process.

SCR 4015 will allow the citizens to be represented the way they want to be represented. Not by some goofball that doesn't even have a doctor's degree.

J 216  
9AM

③ for

① Against

(j) hates oil trucks in the  
theodore Roosevelt National park



**Senate Government and Veterans Affairs Committee  
SCR 4015  
March 5, 2021**

Good morning Chairman Veda and Committee Members. I am Courtney Koebele, the executive director of the North Dakota Medical Association. The North Dakota Medical Association is the professional membership organization for North Dakota physicians, residents, and medical students.

The North Dakota Medical Association opposes Senate Concurrent Resolution 4015 and urges a do not pass from this committee.

NDMA has concerns about making the state health officer an elected position. Many physicians who would be excellent health officers don't have political interests, experience or skills. Public health, like other health professions, requires a life-time commitment and focus to acquire and maintain expertise. Having to engage in the politics of elections would greatly detract from the time required to focus on the ever-changing science of public health.

Making such a position elected, rather than appointed, changes the essence of the role of a physician. In doing so, he or she now becomes by definition, a politician. This includes campaigns, vetting by political groups based not on expertise, but on pre-election scenarios that may bear little resemblance to the at-hand and ever-changing public health decisions required during one's tenure. Concepts of election and constituency have the potential to sway focus away from medical expertise and best practice.

Public health must be neutral and be freed as much as possible from politics to effectively and honestly address the health issues of North Dakota. An elected health officer, even if non-partisan, would bring the politics associated with election processes into the functions of the department to the detriment of the public's health.

We recommend, for the well-being of the citizens of North Dakota, that the State Health Officer remain an appointed physician and not a political figure.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions.

#7376

I support SCR 4015. I believe it's in the best interest of ND that the state health officer be elected by the people and not appointed by the governor and also to qualify to serve as state health officer the person should be a physician licensed to practice in this state. May God guide you and bless you all!

Hello Members of the Senate Government and Veterans Affairs, thank you for taking the time to read my testimony.

My name is Jocelyn Backman and I am a Citizen of District 13 (or what people might consider “old” West Fargo”. I am writing IN SUPPORT of SCR 4015 relating to the election and Qualifications of the State Health Officer.

It is my understanding, ND is under the rule of 1 man (when it comes to the health and wellness of our state), and he is an Attorney. What does an Attorney know about health? A pandemic? What is best for the state when it comes to health and wellness? I’ve also heard that the man makes approximately \$12,000 per month to make the decisions for the health and wellness of the citizens of North Dakota. How is this man qualified for that job? I am a nurse, and as it sits right now, I am way more qualified for the job he has than he is being an Attorney.

This position needs to be one that is voted on by the citizens of North Dakota, no different than our Legislators, City Commissioners, County Commissioners, Mayors, etc. We have every right to know who is sitting in that chair dictating how we live our lives. I urge a YES vote on this bill.

Thank you for your time.

Jocelyn Backman

District 13

3-3-2021

SCR4015 State Health Officer

I am in support of this Bill.

Shari Neigum



# 2021 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Government and Veterans Affairs Committee  
Room JW216, State Capitol

SCR 4015  
3/5/2021  
9:34am

**Relating to election of and qualifications of the state health officer.**

**Chair Vedaa** called to order at 9:34 AM with Sen Vedaa, Meyer, Elkin, K Roers, Weber, Wobbema, and Marsellais present.

**Discussion Topics:**

- Committee Work

**Sen Wobbema:** I move a **Do Not Pass**.

**Sen Weber:** I second.

**Roll Call Vote: 7 -- YES 0 -- NO -0-ab Motion Passed**

<b>Senators</b>	<b>Vote</b>
Senator Shawn Vedaa	Y
Senator Scott Meyer	Y
Senator Jay R. Elkin	Y
Senator Richard Marcellais	Y
Senator Kristin Roers	Y
Senator Mark F. Webber	Y
Senator Michael A. Wobbema	Y

**Sen Roers will carry the bill**

Adjourned at 9:39 AM

*Pam Dever, Committee Clerk*

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE**

**SCR 4015: Government and Veterans Affairs Committee (Sen. Vedaa, Chairman)**  
recommends **DO NOT PASS** (7 YEAS, 0 NAYS, 0 ABSENT AND NOT VOTING).  
SCR 4015 was placed on the Eleventh order on the calendar.