

Ron Saeger, Fargo, letter: N.D. voters fully understood Measure 3

All initiated measures, including Measure 3 regarding the use of tobacco settlement funds, were clearly stated on the ballot and understood by voters

FARGO — As a North Dakotan who served as a poll worker in the November general election, I can assure the Herald's editorial board that all initiated measures, including Measure 3 regarding the use of tobacco settlement funds, were clearly stated on the ballot and understood by voters ("N.D. should turn back new tobacco panel," editorial, Page D1, April 12).

Having worked and voted in many elections, it was especially interesting to note how aware, informed and determined the electorate was and their clear intent to actively send messages to those who govern at all levels.

I found the editorial's attitude and analysis to be demeaning and condescending. Readers deserve better.

Ron Saeger

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Published April 14 2009

Pat McKone, Bismarck, letter: Lung Association: Don't mess with Measure 3

The American Lung Association of North Dakota urges the Legislature to provide the resources approved by the voters.

BISMARCK — The American Lung Association of North Dakota is celebrating its 100th anniversary. This work reflects a rich history of working at the grass roots to educate people about lung health risks ranging from tuberculosis to our most deadly killer, tobacco.

It was this rich history that brought us together with volunteers to collect signatures, campaign and pass Measure 3. The measure assures resources and decisions based on best practices, not political influences, to provide a tobacco-control program.

The tobacco industry remains strong and vigilant in its efforts to addict our children for profits. The industry also retains a strong influence in politics. One only need to look across the country where those settlement dollars have been spent; in most states, very little if any of these dollars are going toward prevention of the harm and destruction caused by tobacco.

That's why Measure 3 and its formation of an advisory committee and executive committee was proposed — that, and the need to make sure that a comprehensive plan for the state was based on best practices for tobacco control programs. In other words, the plan has to be based in science, not politics.

The process of gathering signatures and then winning an election gave us plenty of time to educate the voters and answer questions. Volunteers across the state made presentations, went on talk radio, wrote letters and spoke with friends and neighbors to provide information about Measure 3.

The American Lung Association of North Dakota urges the Legislature to provide the resources approved by the voters. We stand ready to work together to reduce the harm and destruction cause by tobacco.

Pat McKone

McKone is director of mission programs for the American Lung Association of the Upper Midwest.

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Published April 14 2009

Henrik Voldal, Valley City, N.D., letter: Governor can keep committee accountable

Measure 3, as adopted by the voters, states: "The governor may remove any member of the advisory committee for malfeasance in office."

VALLEY CITY, N.D. — I am writing about the Herald's Sunday editorial ("N.D. should turn back new tobacco panel," Page D1).

The editorial's comparison to the Workforce Safety and Insurance board is flawed. The governor did not have the authority to remove members of the WSI board, but he does have authority to remove members of the new tobacco control advisory committee.

Measure 3, as adopted by the voters, states: "The governor may remove any member of the advisory committee for malfeasance in office."

Henrik Voldal

Jason Bergstrand, Fergus Falls, Minn., letter: N.D. needs committee's single-minded focus

The advisory committee will include experienced professionals from various health disciplines coming together with one purpose: to reduce tobacco use, which will save on health care spending and save lives in North Dakota.

FERGUS FALLS, Minn. — I agree with a Herald editorial that legislators are elected to act in voters' best interest ("N.D. should turn back new tobacco panel," editorial, Page D1, April 12).

Regarding Measure 3, however, I disagree on how best to make that happen.

As shown by the November vote, North Dakotans think it's in their best interest to have the most effective tobacco prevention and cessation program they can. Stripping a big portion of the funding away and dismantling the expertise is not in the citizens' best interest.

The editorial states that we don't need another layer of bureaucracy, but fails to mention that precedents have already been set for effective state boards standing independently. There are lots of examples of successful boards that operate outside any state department.

What makes these entities successful is the fact they are made up of experts acting in interest of one specific issue and who are subject to less political pressure and influence.

The advisory committee will include experienced professionals from various health disciplines coming together with one purpose: to reduce tobacco use, which will save on health care spending and save lives in North Dakota.

I am tired of missing out on opportunities that can help reel back the out-of-control healthcare expenses we face. Let's embrace this golden opportunity to do that, and to prevent future suffering and dying due to tobacco addiction as well.

Jason Bergstrand

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State Rep. Lee Kaldor, D-Mayville, letter: Measure 3 -- Voters lead, lawmakers follow

The measure's passage was not a mistake.

MAYVILLE, N.D. — When I read the Herald's Sunday editorial, I first wondered what part of Yes the editorial board did not understand ("N.D. should turn back new tobacco panel," Page D1).

Then I realized the editorial misconstrued history and left out a few salient points.

In North Dakota, the Legislature works for the people, not the other way around. The editorial is wrong when it suggests that the Legislature has carte blanche to ignore the passage of an initiated measure. A successful initiated measure is not a request; it is a directive.

The editorial also is wrong when it suggests that the people erred by passing Measure 3. Voters are just as smart when they elect legislators as they are when they pass an initiated measure. When was the last time the Herald suggested that an elected legislator should step down because the voters did not know what they were doing?

The measure's passage was not a mistake. North Dakota voters can read and comprehend. The ballot language that says Measure 3 creates a committee. The voters were informed of the "problems" by the detractors — including the Herald and many of those who are now seeking to destroy the committee —who hoped to defeat Measure 3.

The detractors particularly informed the voters of the central component of the measure to put someone other than the Health Department or the Legislature in charge of the tobacco programs — because for a decade, the Health Department and the Legislature have failed to spend the tobacco dollars on a comprehensive tobacco plan.

In its editorials in 2008 and statements by the Herald's editor on public radio before the vote on Measure 3, the Herald made the same tired arguments that the editorial board is making now. Yet the voters in the Herald's readership area rejected the paper's attempt to defeat Measure 3 and voted to establish an independent committee to administer the tobacco funds.

Again: What part of Yes doesn't the newspaper understand?

Lee Kaldor

Kaldor, a Democrat, represents District 20 in the North Dakota House.

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Don Vig, Valley City, N.D., letter: Measure deliberately bypasses department

If the Health Department, the Legislature and the governor had kept the people's interests at heart regarding tobacco control over the past 10 years, there would not have been a Measure 3.

VALLEY CITY, N.D. — The Herald's editorial board is right: we do have a beautiful system of checks and balances ... when they work for the people, that is ("N.D. should turn back new tobacco panel," Page D1, April 12).

If the Health Department, the Legislature and the governor had kept the people's interests at heart regarding tobacco control over the past 10 years, there would not have been a Measure 3.

But the officials kept politics at heart instead and spent most of the tobacco settlement dollars on other things besides tobacco control.

The public-health community was not going to be fooled again. This time, the community went directly to the people with the case for using a new pot of tobacco settlement money to curb the number of lives and health care dollars being lost to tobacco in the state.

I would just as soon have those armed with barrels of ink and rolls of paper be a bit more critical of the government, not the people. For when a group of citizens find it necessary to invest their time and resources in the process of an initiated measure, and the voters ultimately pass that measure, it is not without warrant.

Besides, even after all that, the Legislature still can overturn an initiated measure with a two-thirds vote, thus providing yet-another government check against the people in the event that a truly bad measure gets passed.

Yes, a beautiful thing, indeed.

Don Vig

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Published April 14 2009

Sharon Buhr, Valley City, N.D., column: Keep N.D.'s tobacco committee independent

It only makes sense that we give emphasis and focused dedication to a problem that is the single-largest contributor to preventable disease and death — the tobacco epidemic.

By Sharon Buhr

VALLEY CITY, N.D. — The Herald's Sunday editorial asserts that major House amendments to Measure 3 were appropriate because "there was little discussion of the new commission" during last year's election campaign ("N.D. should turn back new tobacco panel," Page D1).

"Probably most voters weren't aware of it."

This is speculation at best, given the many news stories and letters from lawmakers who asked questions specifically about the measure's new "executive committee."

In fact, the ballot title's first sentence addresses the committee.

To speculate that voters were misled by measure proponents is a disingenuous accusation that demeans North Dakota's voters.

Initiated measures offer the people a direct voice, and the Legislature should take great care in implementing them. Any change should be based upon a lot more than speculation. This brings us to the significance of the executive committee and the reason for its being included in the measure.

For more than a decade, the state Department of Health has been constrained by politics and leadership that was not vested in tobacco prevention and cessation efforts. It's not that the employees or public health workers in North Dakota wanted it that way; rather, it stemmed from the political leadership of the agency and those leaders' perspective on the problem.

In 1999, when the settlement dollars were allocated, the Legislature divided them 45 percent for water resources, 45 percent to the school lands trust and 10 percent to the Health Care Trust Fund. The Health Department never argued that its 10 percent allocation was inadequate; and since then, the department has never proposed the full funding of the CDC formula for an effective tobacco prevention and cessation program. Not once.

That's why it's critical to form advisory and executive committees. The committees will make sure that a comprehensive plan following established science-based methods for tobacco

prevention and cessation will be fully implemented and protected from adverse political influence.

It's common in government for committees to do important work. For example, the Commission on Legal Counsel for Indigents delivers of legal services to those financially distressed. Likewise, Protection and Advocacy is an independent board investigating allegations of exploitation of individuals with disabilities. This could have been folded into the Department of Human Services, but advocates determined that this effort required special emphasis and a stand-alone bureaucracy.

The Aeronautics Commission could be under the Department of Transportation. The Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute stands apart. The independent Council on The Arts could be folded into the university system.

Furthermore, a full array of independent agricultural commodity commissions fulfill specific missions. Should they all be put under the Department of Agriculture?

The Department of Health has a wide range of responsibilities including mosquito control, landfill siting and restaurant inspection. This agency is poorly funded and inadequately staffed. Furthermore, it only makes sense that we give emphasis and focused dedication to a problem that is the single-largest contributor to preventable disease and death — the tobacco epidemic.

Buhr has worked in public health in North Dakota for 29 years. She is president of both the City County Health District health board and the Valley City Public School Board.