

# **North Dakota Legislative Campaign Contributions and Expenditures Over the 2020 Election Cycle**

Dr. Nick Bauroth

The Upper Midwest Center on Public Policy

North Dakota State University

June 2022

## Introduction

Candidates for the North Dakota state legislature received \$2,140,560 in contributions over the 2020 election cycle, a 5.8% increase from 2018 (adjusted for inflation). Candidates also spent \$1,785,589 in 2020, an 11.6% increase from 2018. Running for the state house and senate in North Dakota requires more resources than ever before.

This study examines the 2020 year-end reports provided by candidates to the North Dakota Office of Secretary of State.<sup>i</sup> The study compares 2020 campaign contributions and expenditures to those reported in 2018, 2016, and 2014.

A full understanding of recent year-end reports requires historical context.

Traditionally, North Dakota has had something of a reputation for not being fully transparent when it comes to the reporting of campaign finances. However, in 2017, the North Dakota legislature made significant modifications to the reporting requirements for candidates running for state house or senate. Prior to these modifications, legislative campaign committees reported contributions from a single source only when those contributions exceeded \$200. These committees were not required to report campaign expenditures at all. Starting with the 2018 election cycle, though, legislative campaign committees had to report the aggregate totals of all contributions of \$200 or less as well as their aggregate expenditures across certain broad categories.

Limited as they were, these changes allowed North Dakotans to calculate the total amounts raised and spent by legislative candidates in their pursuit of public office.

Before 2018, legislative campaign committees only had to report contributions from sources that exceeded \$200. Such contributions could come in a single lump sum or be spread out over an election cycle. This reporting threshold was high compared to other Midwestern states. For example, Minnesota and South Dakota required their legislative campaign committees to report the sources of all contributions over \$100 as well as the aggregates of all contributions \$100 or less.

Laws overseeing campaign contribution statements are found in Chapter 16.1-08.1 of the North Dakota Century Code.

The 2020 data used in this report has been organized into a searchable Excel file and uploaded it to the Upper Midwest Center on Public Policy's website for public use.<sup>ii</sup> The website also has searchable Excel files for 2018, 2016, 2015, 2014, 2013, 2012, 2011, and 2010.

## Contributions

Table 1 gives an overview of contributions to 160 active legislative campaign committees across North Dakota in 2020. These committees were active in that each received some amount of money across the electoral cycle (57 committees reported zero contributions). The total amount received by all such committees was \$2,140,560 with the largest amount at \$70,033 for Michael Brandenburg (R) in District 28 and the smallest amount at \$131 for Austin Schauer (R) in the 13<sup>th</sup> district. The average committee spent \$13,379, though there was considerable variability.

**Table 1: Contributions to active North Dakota Legislative Campaign Committees, 2020**

	<b>All legislative campaign Committees</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
<b>Total Contributions to active legislative campaign committees</b>	\$2,140,560	\$131.00	\$70,033	\$13,379	\$13,546
<b>Total Contributions of \$200 or less to active legislative campaign committees</b>	\$547,422	\$0.00	\$23,828	\$3,421	\$4,163
<b>Total Contributions over \$200 to active legislative campaign committees</b>	\$1,593,138	\$0.00	\$68,033	\$9,957	\$11,200
<b>Percent of Total Contributions from contributions \$200 or less</b>		0.00%	100.00%	30.12%	27.03%

(N=160)

Total contributions of \$200 or less in 2020 were \$547,422, or 30.6% of all reported contributions. The Joshua Boschee (D) campaign committee in the 44<sup>th</sup> district received the greatest amount of such small contributions at \$23,828, or 35.7% of that committee's total contributions. Some 22 active committees received zero contributions of \$200 or less. On average, committees derived just over 30% of their money through small contributions.

Table 2 provides an overview of the contributions to active legislative campaign

committees from 2014 to 2018. The numbers found in this table have been adjusted for inflation using 2020 dollars.

It should be emphasized that legislative campaign committees did not report small contributions of \$200 or less in 2014 and 2016. Such data are lost to history.

In 2018, the total amount received by all committees was \$2,023,646 with largest amount received at \$114,698 and the smallest amount at \$1,030. The average committee spent \$13,582 (63 committees reported zero contributions).

**Table 2: Contributions to North Dakota Legislative Campaign Committees, 2014, 2016, 2018**

	Total Contributions of \$200 or less	Total Contributions over \$200	Maximum (Total Contributions over \$200)	Mean (Total Contributions over \$200)	Standard Deviation (Total Contributions over \$200)
<b>2014</b> N=127 (198 cases total)		\$1,119,567	\$83,573	\$8,815	\$11,387
<b>2016</b> N= 141 (230 cases total)		\$1,373,646	\$70,452	\$9,731	\$10,778
<b>2018</b> N=149 (213 cases total)	\$519,687	\$1,503,959	\$114,698	\$13,582	\$15,624

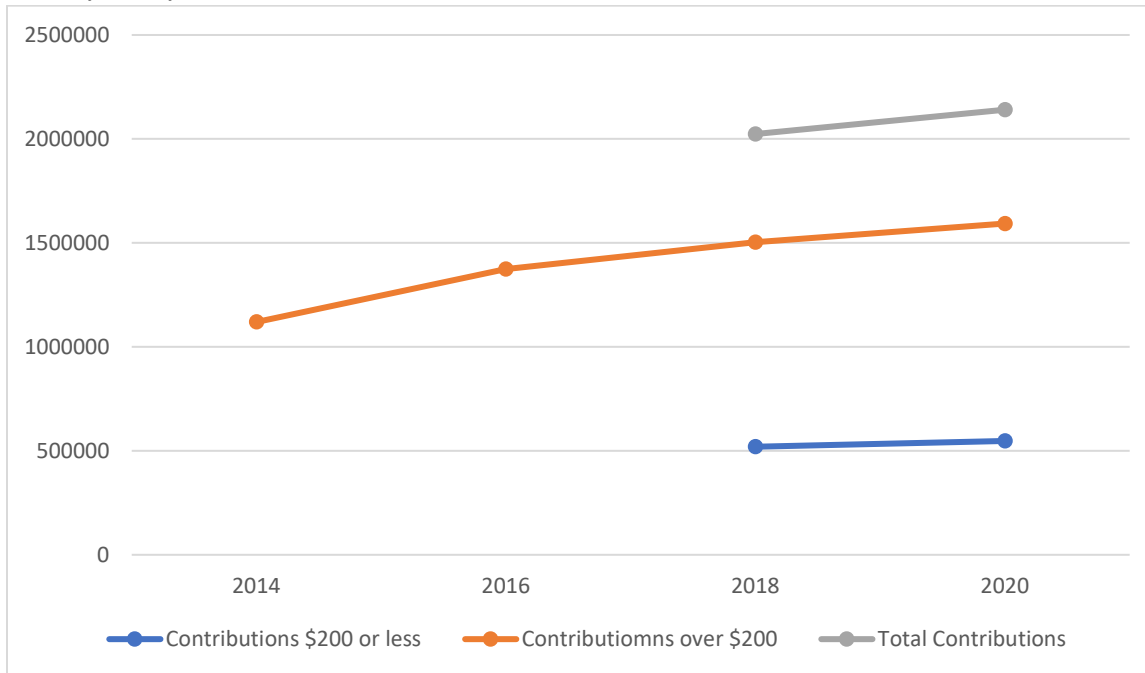
(Using 2020 dollars)

Legislative campaign committees reported receiving \$1,119,567 in 2014 and \$1,373,646 in 2016, a 22.7% increase. Contributions greater than \$200 grew by 9.5% from 2016 to 2018 and 5.9% from 2018 to 2020.

Finally, contributions \$200 or less grew 5.3% from 2018 to 2020.

Figure 1 illustrates reported contributions over the 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2020 election cycles. Using 2020 dollars, reported contributions (greater than \$200) for 2014 and 2016 are compared to those for 2018 and 2018.

**Figure 1: Reported Contributions to North Dakota Legislative Campaign Committees, 2014, 2016, 2018.**



(Using 2020 dollars)

Of the 656 individuals and organizations that contributed money to legislative campaign committees in 2020, the entities making the greatest number of contributions (greater than \$200) included:

Marathon Oil Company Employees PAC	91
Minnkota Power Action Committee	56
ND Coal PAC	52
Nextera Energy Inc PAC	52
North Dakota Rural Electric PAC	51
North Dakota Oil PAC	49
North Dakota Association of Builders PAC	46
BNSF Rail PAC	43
ND Chamber PAC	42
North Dakota Long Term Care Association PAC	41
BNI Coal PAC	38
Broadband Association of North Dakota PAC	34
North Dakota Bankers Association PAC	34
Continental Resources Political Action Committee	33
MDU Resources Group Good Government Fund	33
Burgum, Doug	28
North Dakota Republican House Caucus	29

North Dakota Credit Union PAC	28
Capital Way PAC	27
Lenz, Shelley	27

The amount of money each contributed (greater than \$200) in 2020:

Marathon Oil Company Employees PAC	\$75,600.00
Minnkota Power Action Committee	\$23,050.00
ND Coal PAC	\$30,250.00
Nextera Energy Inc PAC	\$29,850.00
North Dakota Rural Electric PAC	\$28,500.00
North Dakota Oil PAC	\$36,300.00
North Dakota Association of Builders PAC	\$45,500.00
BNSF Rail PAC	\$20,000.00
ND Chamber PAC	\$12,553.00
North Dakota Long Term Care Association PAC	\$26,500.00
BNI Coal PAC	\$9,500.00
Broadband Association of North Dakota PAC	\$17,925.00
North Dakota Bankers Association PAC	\$13,450.00
Continental Resources Political Action Committee	\$23,050.00
MDU Resources Group Good Government Fund	\$11,550.00
North Dakota Republican House Caucus	\$45,500.00
Burgum, Doug	\$40,000.00
North Dakota Credit Union PAC	\$9,200.00
Capital Way PAC	\$9,250.00
Lenz, Shelley	\$13,802.62

It should be noted that individual contributions by these entities of \$200 or less cannot be identified. Thus, the actual amounts contributed could be much higher than reported.

## Expenditures

Table 3 provides an overview of campaign expenditures for all active legislative campaign committees in 2018 and 2020. In 2018, 147 committees reported spending money while 65 reported no expenditures. In 2020, 174 committees reported expenditures while 43 reported no expenditures.

Legislative campaign committees spent \$1,785, 589 over the 2020 election cycle, with 69.1% allocated to Advertising, 2.5% to Campaign Loans, 12.4% percent to Campaign Operations, 1.3% percent to Travel, and 14.7% to Miscellaneous Expenditures. The average committee spent \$10,262.

The Joshua Boschee (D) committee spent the most at \$89,243, with the James Roers (R) committee spending the second largest amount at \$65,492.

**Table 3: Expenditures by North Dakota Legislative Campaign Committees, 2018 and 2020**

	<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>Advertising</b>	<b>Campaign Loan</b>	<b>Operations</b>	<b>Travel</b>	<b>Misc.</b>
<b>2018 Spending by active legislative campaign committees (N=147)</b>	\$1,600,569	\$1,073,489 (67.1%)	\$34,843 (2.2%)	\$226,802 (14.2%)	\$54,387 (3.4%)	\$211,047 (13.2%)
<b>2020 Spending by active legislative campaign committees (N=174)</b>	\$1,785,589	\$1,233,065 (69.1%)	\$43,994 (2.5%)	\$221,300 (12.4%)	\$23,982 (1.3%)	\$263,249 (14.7%)

(Using 2020 dollars)

Legislative campaign committee expenditures over the 2020 election cycle were 11.6% more than expenditures in the 2018 election cycle.

Unfortunately, state law does not require legislative campaign committees to provide any specifics regarding who received this money and what services they provided.

## Endnotes

---

<sup>i</sup> See <https://vip.sos.nd.gov/PortalListDetails.aspx?ptlhPKID=133&ptlPKID=4#content-start>

<sup>ii</sup> See [https://www.ndsu.edu/centers/publicpolicy/studies\\_and\\_reports/](https://www.ndsu.edu/centers/publicpolicy/studies_and_reports/)