



North Dakota Association Stands Up for Local Control in Property Tax Battle -- and Wins!

This spring, when Jill Beck, Association Executive of the North Dakota Association of REALTORS® (NDAR,) would go out in public wearing both her REALTOR® name badge and a 'Vote No on Measure 2' button, she would get funny looks from people sensing a mixed message. Measure 2 was a controversial item on the June ballot that would have abolished the state's century-old property tax.

"On the surface, it may have seemed contradictory or counter-intuitive for REALTORS® to be in favor of property taxes," says Beck, "but it didn't take much digging to see that the bill was bad legislation." Getting rid of the tax would have empowered the state legislature to replace the lost income by creating new revenue sources, over which the voting public would have virtually no say.

NDAR joined an astonishing coalition of more than 80 groups that opposed the measure, coming together to educate and mobilize voters. Two of the nine seats on the 'Keep It Local, North Dakota' coalition's steering committee were held by Beck and her Government Affairs Director, Claus Lembke. Recognizing that the available funds from the state association's own Issues Mobilization program wouldn't make a dent in the \$700,000 campaign budget, NDAR turned to the National Association of REALTORS® for assistance. "This is a fiercely independent state, largely rural, and we typically do not like to ask for help. But we had to. And it worked," says Beck. She notes that having all their information together and being comfortable with what they were asking for made the application process fairly simple.

NDAR was awarded an Issues Mobilization grant of \$100,000, which covered polling and campaign advertising, including television, radio, newspaper, and social media. It also paid for 11 news conferences and numerous debates that helped get the word out about the property tax issue and the importance of voting down Measure 2. "We may be a small state association, only 1,500 members," says Beck, "but we sure had a presence at these events. We called on our members to come out in force, and they did -- wearing their buttons, acting as spokespeople, and doing us proud. People kept remarking that they had no idea how many REALTORS® were here in North Dakota!"

On voting day, Measure 2 was defeated by 77%.

NAR made it easy, says Beck. "They didn't just send a check; they were deeply involved in the campaign. We were in constant communication with them, and they provided us with consultants who really understood us and spoke our language." The polling conducted by NAR allowed the coalition to re-allocate valuable resources, shifting advertising dollars to where they were most needed.



“Polling had shown that our numbers were strong, and we knew that we could win – but we couldn’t afford to be complacent. There was a significant danger from the well-meaning voters, especially in the more isolated rural communities, who were saying, ‘Our property taxes are too high, and we don’t think it should be eliminated, but we want to send a strong message to our legislators.’ Well,” she points out, “that’s exactly how Minnesota elected Jesse Ventura.”

North Dakota’s next legislative session is in January 2013, and NDAR has already been asked to join forces with two different groups working on other legislative issues involving property rights. “We are definitely now recognized as a political force,” says Beck.

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