

They Shoot Horses, Don't They?

March 2, 2023

North Dakota state representatives (and I use that term loosely) are unhappy.

Very unhappy.

They have no use for the Ethics Commission that voters established back in 2018 by passing a constitutional amendment initiated by citizen petition. State legislators [reacted](#) by trying to — *ahem* — “fix” the horse the ethics measure “rode in on.”

That is, wreck the state’s ballot initiative process, to prevent citizens from making such reforms happen . . . without any “[help](#)” from politicians.

Seems politicians in Bismarck, the state capital, are even less fond of term limits. They’ve introduced a raft of bills designed to kill the citizen petition process . . .

Legislators placed a constitutional amendment on the ballot to require that any citizen-initiated amendment be approved not merely by North Dakota voters, but then by both chambers of the state legislature. Their amendment, amid uproar, was finally amended so that if legislators voted the initiative down, voters would get a second vote on it.

Still, 62 percent of voters said, “No, thanks!”

Then, in 2022, the state Chamber of Commerce and other special interests attempted to use the citizen petition process, which they always say is way too easy. Yet, these insiders failed to gather enough signatures to qualify their measure requiring a 60 percent supermajority to pass an initiative.

Meanwhile, term limits supporters gathered enough signatures* and,



last November, North Dakotans said, “Yes!”

Seems politicians in Bismarck, the state capital, are even less fond of term limits. They’ve introduced a raft of bills designed to [kill](#) the citizen petition process:

- [House Bill 1452](#) would slap a 90 percent tax on contributions to ballot measures by any American living outside North Dakota.
- [House Bill 1230](#) would fine a campaign committee \$10,000 and each of committee member \$1,000 each if the petitions they turn in fail to have enough valid signatures to qualify the initiative.
- [Senate Concurrent Resolution 4013](#) would amend the state constitution to (a) require 25 percent more voter signatures, (b) outlaw any payment to signature gatherers (something the U.S. Supreme Court has already [ruled](#) state governments cannot do), (c) block new residents from petitioning in the state for in some cases over a year, and (d) mandate a 67 percent vote to pass a citizen-initiated ballot measure.

North Dakota legislators prove the case for term limits. *And* the horse it rode in on: citizen initiative.

This is Common Sense. I’m Paul Jacob.

* Though term limits supporters had to fight the 30-year incumbent Secretary of State’s attempt to [block](#) the petition all the way to the state’s highest court, which ruled unanimously to place term limits before the voters.