



In A New Year, Continuing to Fight for North Dakota

By U.S. Senator Heidi Heitkamp

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It's been quite a year. People often ask me what it's like serving in the U.S. Senate, as Congress has become so partisan and filled with gridlock. I'm quick to remind them that far too often in Congress, extreme views on the right and left get all the attention. But there are those in the middle, who work across the aisle to negotiate, compromise, and reach results. I'm proud to be one of those senators. That's how I've always worked. It isn't flashy, but it's how to get the job done for our state and it's what North Dakotans rightfully expect.

Just in the past year, there's a great deal we've been able to accomplish. As our state faced a serious and dangerous drought, I successfully pushed to ensure impacted cattle ranchers could get capital gains tax relief and got the U.S. Agriculture Department to provide disaster relief to farmers and ranchers in many impacted counties.

A bipartisan bill I introduced to boost investments in startups and small businesses in rural communities passed in the Senate.

I helped write and introduce a bill to ensure the 2,000 North Dakota workers and retirees who paid into the Central States Pension Plan can keep the pensions they earned which are at risk through no fault of their own. And now I'm working with a group of senators to try to include that bill in larger legislation to fund the government.

Over the summer, I reintroduced my bill to forge a viable path forward for coal while reducing emissions that brought together a broad bipartisan coalition of unlikely allies, including progressive and conservative senators as well as coal companies, environmental groups, and labor organizations. I'm working to pass this bill in the new year.

Working with a bipartisan group of six senators, we introduced a bill to prevent websites from knowingly facilitating online sex trafficking – as Backpage.com did -- and allowing victims to seek justice. The bill, which we're hoping to soon pass, followed a multi-year investigation.

I worked for several years on two bipartisan bills I introduced last year to provide regulatory relief for community banks and credit unions in rural communities -- which passed in committee with strong bipartisan support -- as well as broader regulatory reform to make federal rules smarter and more effective for businesses, families, and jobs.

To help address the epidemic of missing and murdered Native American women, I introduced Savanna's Act, and the bill quickly received a committee hearing.

A bill I helped introduce, which became law, will extend and reform the Veterans Choice Program and make sure veterans can get care closer to home.

In addition to holding my fifth and sixth discussions across North Dakota about combating the opioid epidemic, I'm pushing for a bill to make sure communities are equipped with the resources and tools they need to fight the growing crisis.

This past year, we made strong progress for North Dakota and there's still much more to do. But while I'm working in the U.S. Senate, it's the selfless actions of North Dakotans every day that truly make a difference.

Last year, I presented an award to a rural letter carrier in Drayton who recognized that mail had piled up outside the home of an elderly customer and she called the police. The police broke down the door to find the elderly resident unresponsive. The resident was taken to the hospital and survived because of the instinct and thoughtfulness of the letter carrier.

After hearing some students at Mandan High School talk about family members impacted by the hurricane in Puerto Rico, their peers and the school held fundraisers for Puerto Rico relief effort, raising \$1,400.

During this past holiday season, an all-volunteer nonprofit in Fargo raised money and then worked to deliver food, toys, clothing, and more to local families in need, making Christmas possible for many families and children.

This is the North Dakota I know. These inspiring stories are a reminder of why I come to work in the U.S. Senate every day fighting for North Dakota. It's a true honor to serve our state and I look forward to a productive new year.

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