

Park Free or Die: Rural Consciousness, Preemption, and the Perennial North Dakota Parking-Meter Debate

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ABSTRACT

North Dakota's unique statewide parking-meter ban was instituted by initiated measure in 1948. The 2017 legislative session witnessed the most credible effort to repeal the ban in decades. The legislative debate centered on tradition, the state's long-standing urban–rural split, and its lingering populist roots. The authors place this debate within a larger rural-consciousness literature and examine how the politics of rural resentment contributed to maintaining the parking-meter ban, as well as the willingness of state lawmakers to use preemption as a tool to constrain the authority of larger cities. The authors also examine the complexity surrounding individual place-based identities. The extent to which urban residents in a rural state can simultaneously identify as “urban” relative to state-based policies and politics and “rural” relative to federal-based policies and politics merits further consideration.


Uniquely in the United States, North Dakota statute bans the use of parking meters on public streets. Since the passage of a referendum forbidding their use in 1948, lawmakers from the state's larger cities periodically have waged unsuccessful efforts to repeal the ban. The authors consider the reasons contributing to the failure of the most recent repeal effort that played out in the 2017–2019 biennial legislative session. The longevity of the North Dakota parking-meter ban is couched in a much larger urban–rural split but also illustrates features of state politics more generally, including rural political culture, a growing prevalence of rural consciousness and resentment, and increasing levels of state preemption of local decision-making authority.


NORTH DAKOTA POLITICAL CULTURE


Contemporary politics in North Dakota evolved from a culture firmly rooted in a distrust of centralized government and

corporate institutions (Robinson 1966). These norms, sometimes referred to as “prairie populism,” are embodied in the state's 1889 Constitution and established the fundamental laws and institutions that reinforced and maintained these values over time. This included efforts to protect rural interests from corporate abuses of power and from legislators who became indebted to special interests. North Dakota's expansive local infrastructure, with 2,664 substate government units for a population of fewer than 800,000 residents (US Census Bureau 2021), reflects its long-standing participatory culture (Omdahl 2017) and its predilection for equal distribution of public costs and benefits (Pedeliski and Smith 2006). Former Lieutenant Governor Lloyd Omdahl (2017) emphasized this culture as follows: “We have more local governments per capita than any other state. We have over 1,000 townships so that even five or six people can have their own government....North Dakota prefers participation to efficiency.” The state's participatory culture also emphasizes local control and a steadfast trust for the populace to do the right thing, which is evidenced by the state's accessible direct-democracy procedures: the signatures of only 2% of qualified voters are required for initiated measures and referenda.

Another pervasive feature of North Dakota political culture is a politics of location, which originates in its territorial days. Historical cleavages, such as the politics of locality, egalitarianism, and

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mistrust of the executive, reinforce this populist political culture that is especially pronounced among the state's rural areas (Pedeleski and Smith 2006). This persistent urban–rural split divides the state into “two North Dakotas”: “the first is rural, aging, declining, often pessimistic, and sometimes fearful of the future. The second is urban, growing, vital, optimistic, and hopeful. The first often regards the second with bitterness and anger, while the second demonstrates little understanding of what the first is going through” (Danbom 1995, 588).

Inherent to the politics of location is a long-standing legislative divide that is embodied by the politically charged term “Imperial Cass.” This implies that the state's most populous county (i.e., Cass County) and its county seat (i.e., Fargo) “wield undue influence in pursuit of disproportionate shares of state resources, thus violating long-standing egalitarian norms” (Harsell 2020, 221). Cass County's population of 184,525 accounts for approximately 24% of the state's population.

RURAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE POLITICS OF RURAL RESENTMENT

One clarifying vein of research considers “rural consciousness,” or the sense by rural citizens that policy makers ignore their communities and deprive them of their fair share of resources relative to urban communities (Cramer 2016). Rural consciousness transcends a sense of place and includes a perception that “rural folks are fundamentally different from urbanites in terms of lifestyles, values, and work ethic” (Cramer 2016, 5). Rural fears of exploitation by urban areas are a long-standing feature of American (and world) politics (see, e.g., Rodden 2019).

Rural resentment stems from a perception that rural areas are regularly and unfairly exploited by urban areas in a zero-sum game (Cramer 2016; Stahl 2017). This pervasive feeling that “urban dwellers” do not respect the beliefs and labor of “rural folk” informs voting patterns and policy preferences—what Cramer called “the politics of resentment.” In summary, the politics of rural resentment occur when “political actors mobilize support for cutting back government by tapping into resentment toward certain groups in society rather than appealing to broad principles” (Cramer 2016, 27).

The longevity of the parking-meter ban is a function of the persistent urban–rural tensions in North Dakota and an issue that historically has been framed as an unfair “tax on rural residents” who conduct business in the state's more populous areas. This frame has long played on the state's politics of location and is perceived by many rural residents as an unequal distribution of public costs and benefits—and thus a violation of the state's long-standing egalitarian norms.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NORTH DAKOTA PARKING-METER BAN

In North Dakota, the use of parking meters in urban areas became a powerful cultural and political marker and a focus for rural resentment (McMaster 1999). Indeed, retired *Grand Forks Herald* editor, Mike Jacobs, observed that free parking in North Dakota “is pretty much regarded as a basic human right” (Hagerty 2017). The fault lines of the parking-meter ban emerged from a lingering

resentment by rural shoppers who had to pay for the “privilege” of parking (and shopping) in the state's urban areas.

The people of North Dakota first voted to ban parking meters in a 1948 statewide initiated measure. The move to outlaw the new devices was spearheaded by Howard Henry—a legislator from rural Westhope—after he received a court summons for accumulating 12 parking-meter violations during his shopping trips to Minot. His granddaughter, JoNell Bakke, herself a state senator, described his opposition to parking meters in simple terms: “He just didn't feel it was right to have to pay to park and shop in North Dakota” (MacPherson 2017). The ban has never been popular with the leadership of North Dakota's larger cities, who typically support local options to regulate downtown parking and to raise revenue.

A referendum to repeal the law before it could take effect failed in the 1948 General Election. Then, responding to pressure from city leaders, the legislature repealed the law in 1951. Once more a referral was initiated, and voters reinstated the parking-meter ban in 1952. Despite occasional legislative efforts to revisit the issue, the ban has remained state law (Haga 2007). The 2017 legislative session witnessed the most credible effort in decades to repeal the ban and legalize parking meters.

LOCAL CONTROL OR RURAL IMPOSITION?

Place-based identities are an enduring feature of how rural Americans make sense of political issues (Jacobs and Munis 2019). The longevity of the parking-meter ban is a function of the persistent urban–rural tensions in North Dakota and an issue that historically has been framed as an unfair “tax on rural residents” who conduct business in the state's more populous areas. This frame has long played on the state's politics of location and is perceived by many rural residents as an unequal distribution of public costs and benefits—and thus a violation of the state's long-standing egalitarian norms. In reference to the historical ban, North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum remarked that Henry “made it a populist thing and urban versus rural” (MacPherson 2017). Former rural legislator and radio talk show host Joel Heitkamp summarized the issue by stating, “It's a big city versus rural issue. People who drive into town don't want to

pay to shop. Most of our politicians are from the city now, so they don't understand” (McKinley 2017).

However, the parking-meter debate also raises a critical question about the capacity for localities to better manage a limited resource. Supporters of lifting the ban during the 2017 legislative session, including Governor Burgum and the North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT), sought to redefine the effort as a matter of limited government and local control. Indeed,

the March 2 testimony of NDDOT Transportation Programs Director Steve Salwei (2017) to the House Transportation Committee noted that:

By allowing cities to use parking meters, we would be adding another tool in the toolbox to address one of the many challenges in transportation. By having more options, we believe we can lower infrastructure costs. In closing, the North Dakota Department of Transportation supports local decision making. We believe that North Dakota's communities are best positioned to understand the parking challenges and solutions, impacting their residents and businesses.

Governor Burgum supported the local-control argument, contending that “metered parking would help with parking turnover and, in turn, give businesses a chance at pulling in more revenue” and that cities should be able to have the ability to decide whether or not they want them. “It’s about giving cities the tools they need,” he said. “Local control is the way to go” (Baumgarten 2017). In this context, by maintaining the ban, “big government” (i.e., the state government) unfairly bends local governments to its will.

City leaders in Dickinson, the state’s seventh-largest city (population 22,186), announced its support for ending the ban, noting that they had no plans to add parking meters but wanted the flexibility if a future need arose. They strongly endorsed the ideal of local control (Decker and Kessel 2017). Fargo Mayor Timothy Mahoney used arguments for efficient parking turnover and for local control (Mahoney 2017), and Senator Jessica Unruh (District 33, New Salem/Mercer)—who co-sponsored the repeal bill—viewed local control of parking rules as the critical issue (Hagerty 2017).

The ideal of local control is honored widely in North Dakota. However, Senator David Rust (District 2, Tioga) framed local control in negative terms, claiming that certain localities would be imposing their will on outsiders who have no say in their decisions (Senate Transportation Committee 2017). The previous discussion echoes two old but recurring North Dakota ideals: (1) its predilection for citizen participation in political decision making (Omdahl 2017); and (2) that larger cities would use parking meters to exploit rural residents who travel to the state’s urban centers to shop or conduct other business (Jendrysik and Harsell 2013). Indeed, much of the committee hearings and floor debates tapped into the politics of rural resentment by focusing on these long-standing “politics of location” issues, including state versus local control, urban–rural divides, and an underlying perception that a repeal of the ban disproportionately would favor the state’s largest population center (i.e., Fargo/Cass County). As explained in the next section, differing bills to end the parking-meter ban passed the House and Senate, only to have the Conference Committee’s amended bill fail in the second House vote.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY AND OUTCOME OF THE REPEAL BILL

The original repeal bill received a unanimous “Do Pass” recommendation from the Senate Transportation Committee on February 2, 2017, after a short discussion about the virtues of local control and whether portions of the bill should be amended. When the issue of taxation was raised, committee chair Lonnie Laffen (District 43, Grand Forks) responded “on one side of my core belief is I don’t like taxes and on the other side is local control. For me, local control wins, as they have the choice as to whether they will raise their parking fees or not. And I think that is where it should lie” (Senate Transportation Committee 2017). Prior to this

committee vote, Senator Jonathan Casper (District 27, Fargo) stated that he would not support any amendments to the bill “because my voting for this is for local control” (Senate Transportation Committee 2017). Then, on February 3, 2017, without debate or discussion, the Senate passed the bill by a 33–10 margin, stating simply that “Section 39-01-09 of the North Dakota Century Code is repealed” (see North Dakota Century Code 2022 for the full text of the statute).

The House Transportation Committee’s version maintained the statutory ban but added an exemption that would permit parking meters if first approved by the voters. The key language stated: “If approved by a majority of the voters of the jurisdiction voting on the question at a general election, a political subdivision or an agency, department, or institution of the state may approve the use of parking meters.” Its sponsor justified the inclusion of a public vote, stating that “I think we should allow the voters to decide if we remove the prohibition” (House Transportation Committee 2017). The committee approved a “Do Pass” recommendation by a 12–2 margin. This amended version of the bill aligned with the state’s participatory culture, and it passed the House on March 9 with a strong majority (53–38); the bill then was referred to the Conference Committee for reconciliation.

In a 5–1 vote, the Conference Committee (2017) further modified the language regarding local options on April 7. The final version left it up to the “governing body of a political subdivision” to decide *whether or not* to put the question up for a public vote. As amended, the key provision of the bill stated: “A governing body of a political subdivision *may* [emphasis added] place on the ballot the question of whether metered parking should be approved for use in the political subdivision.” The amended version was introduced into the Senate and passed by a 33–13 margin on April 10 without debate or discussion.

However, the Conference Committee’s version failed in the April 12 House vote by a 29–59 margin (North Dakota State Legislature, 2017). Its key change in wording (i.e., removing the public-vote requirement) was defended during the April 12 House floor debate, citing the low expense of new parking-control technologies (i.e., compared to employing parking-enforcement staff) and as a way for local governments to avoid the expense of elections. Representative James Grueneich (District 12, Jamestown) responded to the change, noting that if a “city proposes to install parking meters and there is no pushback from the people, there really isn’t a need to go through the time or expense of putting it on a ballot” (House of Representatives 2017). Representative Thomas Beadle (District 27, Fargo), also in support of the bill, argued that parking meters could improve business in the state’s limited number of downtown areas by increasing customer turnover. Representative Dan Ruby (District 38, Minot) reasoned that the “people who just absolutely hate parking meters” will never see them in their communities or in “the majority of the communities” they visit (House of Representatives 2017).

However, several House members expressed incredulity over handing local control to political subdivisions without requiring a vote of the people, invoking the state’s cultural predilection for citizen input and its long-held trust in the populace. To this end, Representative Ben Koppelman (District 16, West Fargo) voiced his objections to the change in language, arguing that he “was leaning toward more local control and voting for the original [House] bill.” He cited his faith “in the people’s vote” and that the change creates a “smoke screen” that allows “any majority of a

governing body to allow parking meters” (House of Representatives 2017). Ultimately, the addition of the *optional* local-referral language rendered an otherwise palatable bill into a liability for many House members.

LEGISLATIVE ANALYSIS

To further examine and contextualize these questions, the authors analyzed roll-call votes for the Senate (February 6 and April 10) and the House (March 9 and April 12). As noted previously, votes were held in both chambers before and after conference. The vote

The use of state legislative districts limited the available number of covariates. Another challenge was the fact that certain variables contained extreme values. For example, in North Dakota, there are several legislative districts with little to no rural population and many other districts with 100% of the population in rural areas (figure 1).

As mentioned previously, the Senate voted in favor of the legislation both times, even with some vote-switching by state senators. The House approved the legislation on the first vote and then failed to pass the repeal on the second vote, with significant

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Table 1
Senate Votes Tabulation

February 6/April 10	Absent	No	Yes	Total
Absent	0	2	2	4
No	0	8	2	10
Yes	1	3	29	33
Total	1	13	33	47

Table 2
House Votes Tabulation

March 9/April 12	Absent	No	Yes	Total
Absent	0	3	0	3
No	4	33	1	38
Yes	2	23	28	53
Total	6	59	29	94

tabulations display the two votes for each chamber, highlighting any changes in the overall votes and any changes or transitions in votes (tables 1 and 2). In the Senate, only five members shifted their vote from February 3 to April 10 (i.e., two changed from “no” to “yes” and three changed from “yes” to “no”). In the House, 25 members shifted their vote from March 9 to April 12 (i.e., two changed from “no” to “yes” and 23 changed from “yes” to “no”). This article provides analysis of the vote outcomes in both chambers. However, given that the defeat of the amended bill was driven by opposition in the House, most of the discussion focuses on the House votes.

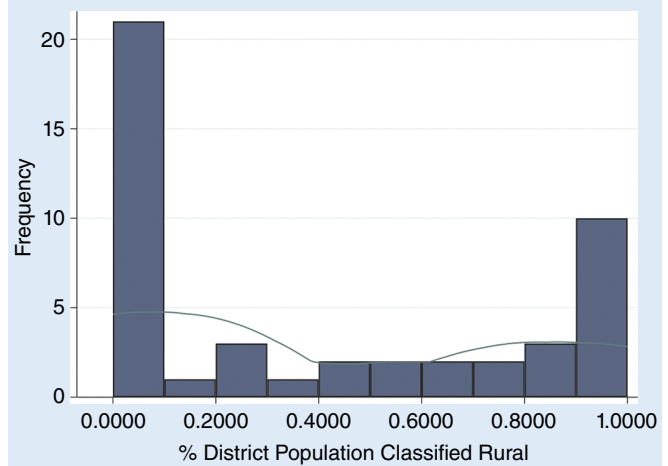
The authors analyzed the sequence of votes for the two chambers and examined the impact that rurality exerted on the outcome of each vote (Harsell, Flynn, and Jendrysik 2022). A probit regression (i.e., a “no” vote equaled 1) was used for each district (table 3). The analysis then was divided by chamber, providing one Senate vote per district in each of the two voting rounds and two votes for each House district. The “no” votes were the decision of interest, which is why they were used in this analysis.

Table 3
Senate Vote Probit Results

Probit Regression (“No”=1)		
Variables	Senate Vote 1	Senate Vote 2
Rural Population %	0.3449 (0.5133)	0.4752 (0.4974)
Median Income	0.0459 (0.0394)	0.0681* (0.000040)
Constant	-2.5962 (1.4757)	-3.2491 (1.5122)

Note: *Significant at the 10% level.

Figure 1
Legislative District Rural Population Percentage Histogram with Kernel Density



vote-switching by legislators. Table 3 presents results of the first and second Senate votes.

In neither Senate vote did rural population impact the likelihood of a “no” vote. The authors conducted a t-test and found that,

Table 4
House Vote Probit Results

Probit Regression ("No"=1)		
Variables	House Vote 1	House Vote 2
Rural Population %	0.7064* (0.3303)	0.2384 (0.3330)
Median Income	0.0544* (0.000025)	0.0327 (0.000021)
Constant	-2.477** (0.92826)	-0.91842 (0.76088)

Note: *Significant at the 5% level; **significant at the 1% level.

for the Senate, the rural population percentage was not significantly different between “yes” and “no” voters in both votes. It was only in the second vote that median income was mildly significant, in the statistical sense, whereas the coefficient demonstrated a mild impact on vote outcomes, increasing by 2% for every \$1,000 increase in median income.

The most changes from “yes” to “no” occurred in the House. As shown in table 2, there were 23 “yes” votes from the first House vote that switched to “no” on the second House vote. For the first vote in the House, both the percentage of district population that was rural and the median income were significant at the 0.05 level (table 4). The coefficient values for rural population for the first House vote indicate that a higher rural population percentage increased the probability of a “no” vote. Examination of the marginal effects around the mean (table 5) suggests that a 10% increase in the rural population of a district increased the probability of a “no” vote by 2.7% in the first House roll-call vote. This result was significant at the 5% level. Median income also was significant at the 5% level, although the impact was low—that is, a 2% increase in the probability of a “no” vote for every \$1,000 increase in median income.

The second House roll-call vote yielded a significant change in votes from “yes” to “no,” and the bill failed to pass. With the increased number of “no” votes, the district rural population percentage and median income both lost statistical significance compared to the first House vote. As described previously, the districts with representatives switching their votes clearly reduced the impact and significance of rural population in the second

Table 5
Marginal Effects of Covariates for House Votes

Marginal Effects (Pr(No))		
Variables	House Vote 1	House Vote 2
Rural Population %	0.2710* (0.12657)	0.0901 (0.1259)
Median Income	0.0208* (0.0095)	0.012 (0.0081)

Note: *Significant at the 5% level.

House vote. The authors ran another t-test across the two different votes and found that the district rural population percentage was significantly different between “yes” and “no” voters at the 5% level for the first vote, but it was not significantly different for the second House vote.

The authors also ran the same regression for the subset that did not vote “no” the first time. This included both “yes” votes and any abstentions from the first House roll-call that recorded a vote for the second roll-call. Rural population percentage and median income also were not significant for this grouping. Rural population may be a part of the narrative; however, when measured with the legislative-district rural population, it appears relevant only in the House—and only for the first vote. Other factors overcame the importance and impact of rurality, some of which are discussed in the following section.

DISCUSSION OF LEGISLATIVE ANALYSIS

Why did a critical number of House members change their position from the March 12 vote to the April 10 vote? Much of the early legislative debates linked the repeal effort to the state’s time-honored ideal of local control. The salience of this frame engendered support from a key number of rural senators, and it was palatable for a number of rural House members—provided that voters first approved the use of parking meters within their jurisdiction. However, the Conference Committee’s version of the bill shifted the narrative of the repeal effort in subtle but consequential ways.

During the April 12 House floor debate, opponents reframed the context and meaning of “local control” different from the commonly understood authority of political subdivisions. Representative Kim Koppelman (District 13, West Fargo) exemplified this shift in thinking during the April 10 House debate when he argued that the “ultimate local control is not a local political subdivision...the ultimate local control is the people” (House of Representatives 2017). Consistent with the politics of rural resentment, some House members argued that the unrestrained adoption of parking meters by political subdivisions could institutionalize a form of distributive injustice among the surrounding rural areas. In support of this frame, Representative Jim Kasper (District 45, Fargo) asserted that Fargo’s five elected city commissioners were the only people in Fargo who supported the installation of parking meters (House of Representatives 2017).

Also consistent with the politics of rural resentment, the repeal debate accentuated the growing difference between the Fargo metropolitan area and the rest of North Dakota on questions of development and government intervention to direct that development. The growth of Fargo has caused friction in the state because the city and its metropolitan area became the driver of growth after the end of the state’s oil boom. Senator Lonnie J. Laffen (District 43, Grand Forks) noted that only “Fargo, as they are the one that has the downtown parking problem,” was likely to use parking meters (Conference Committee 2017). In floor debate on April 12, Representative Thomas Beadle (District 27, West Fargo) believed that this question would affect only about six blocks in downtown Fargo. He went on to state that local elected officials are closer to the people than members of the legislature and should be given the chance to make these choices. However, Representative Rick Becker (District 7, Bismarck) saw more sinister anti-democratic motives behind “Fargo’s effort.” In

floor debate on April 12, he claimed that “a lot of people that want this bill [sic] are the Fargo-based people. They specifically don’t want the amendment going to the voters because they fully anticipate that the voters will vote it down, but the [city] commissioners will institute them readily.”

Ultimately, the repeal effort pitted one set of prairie-populism norms (i.e., local control) against another set (i.e., egalitarianism and citizen participation). In this case, the politics of rural resentment shifted the debate away from local control and even shifted the locus of “local control” from political subdivision to the people. Notably, local control often is seen as the level closest to the people; however, in this case, localities came to be understood as actors that could subvert the will of the people on a long and contentious issue. Arguably, the fear that unchecked local

In North Dakota, the almost 70-year-old statutory ban on parking meters coupled with the legislature’s long-standing recalcitrance to modify or loosen the statewide ban is (at least functionally) a form of state preemption. By frustrating the efforts of Fargo interests to overturn the ban, members of the House who wanted to preserve the status quo were able to appeal to the lingering distrust of urban areas in the state and the new and growing resistance to the demands of “Imperial Cass.” By equating paying for parking as an imposition to rural residents and reframing the virtues of traditional local control in this matter as a potential threat to the will of the people, representatives opposing the repeal nevertheless were able to defend small-government ideals while using preemptive measures that effectively affirmed state control over the issue. By demanding that local voters—not local elected

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(government) control could lead to further exploitation of “rural dwellers” elevated the norms of egalitarianism over the state’s norms of local-government autonomy. The potential for localities to institutionalize distributive injustice vis-à-vis parking meters overshadowed other concerns.

The failure of the repeal effort also suggests two additional features related to the broader politics of rural resentment. First, states increasingly are turning to preemption as a tool to assert rural policy values. The increased use of state preemption reflects a larger “urban–rural” policy fissure across the United States and that a weakened state of intrastate federalism has led to unprecedented increases in state preemption over local prerogatives (Stahl 2017). Second, rural and urban identities are not monolithic (Scala and Johnson 2017) and may be much more dynamic in the broader context of the federated US system of government.

PREEMPTION AS A TOOL IN THE URBAN–RURAL DIVIDE

Historically, the role of US cities has been subordinated to the “whim of state policy makers” and sometimes state legislatures have used “coercive methods to substitute state priorities for local policy making” (Goodman, Hatch, and McDonald 2021, 147). However, state governments have not always regulated the actions of cities with such a heavy hand (Stahl 2017). Increasingly, preemption is becoming a front that reflects the growing resentment between rural and urban areas as they compete in the political realm for control over finite resources in a zero-sum conflict (Stahl 2017). Moreover, as “classic preemption disputes continue to arise...the real action today is the *new preemption* [emphasis in the original]; sweeping state laws that clearly, intentionally, extensively, and at times punitively bar local efforts to address a host of local problems” (Briffault 2018, 1997). In this sense, preemption becomes a mechanism to stymie local efforts by urban majorities in favor of statewide laws that reflect rural values (Stahl 2017).

officials or technocrats—decide the question, opponents of the repeal were able to remain loyal to a particular vision of prairie populism. However, the limits to this reasoning were not lost on all members. One legislator characterized the state as “schizophrenic” regarding local control, noting that the state is supportive of local control “if locals do what we tell them” (Anonymous, March 30, 2018. Author’s personal interview with the legislator).

PLURAL SPATIAL IDENTITIES

Although differences among urban and rural areas increasingly are studied along a continuum, the urban–rural binary still holds “relevance for the academy and the public” (Hiner 2014, 70) and the commentariat (Scala and Johnson 2017). It is axiomatic that policy and management implications inherent to this persistent binary “lead to and/or maintain material differences between the places” (Hiner 2014, 70). Although the politics of the rural-resentment narrative unpacks the defeat of the repeal ban in the House, the analysis also suggests that additional dynamics are in play.

One area deserving of further study includes untangling rural-based politics within the context of the US federated system of governance. It is well established that people are capable of ascribing to multiple and sometimes competing social-identity frames (Barvosa-Carter 2001). These frames include strong attachments to place (Jacobs and Munis 2019), and place-based identities influence how residents understand political actions that affect those places (Agnew 1987; Jacobs and Munis 2020). The urban-serving legislators who opposed the repeal effort (casting consecutive “no” votes for the repeal effort) or who shifted their vote from “yes” to “no” may ascribe simultaneously to competing spatial identities.

For example, residents of Fargo and/or its suburban areas may identify strongly with rural North Dakota in the context of national politics and policy in which North Dakota is largely viewed as a rural “flyover” state. However, those same residents may identify as urban when state-level policy discussions turn to

issues salient to the state's more urban centers. The strength of individual place-based identities relative to the frames activated in the April 12 House debate (i.e., local control versus the threat of rural imposition) may account for some of the opposition among House members who served urban districts.

CONCLUSION

The question of whether to allow parking meters in North Dakota has a symbolic value and meaning far beyond any practical effect on the lives of most of its citizens. As noted previously, the entire question affects only a few blocks in the state's largest city. Yet, the issue has become fraught with larger questions that reflect changes in the state and its history.

At the national level, the North Dakota parking-meter saga illustrates important features of contemporary state politics, including rural consciousness and the politics of rural resentment, the use of local preemption to advance statewide laws that reflect rural values, and the contours of the urban-rural divide more generally. This analysis also advances the discussion of rural consciousness by considering how the potent divisions underlying the politics of rural resentment can be brought to bear in state legislative arenas as well as on legislative behavior.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors acknowledge the North Dakota Legislative Council for providing legislative histories and other research used in this article. The authors also acknowledge Tom Dennis (2008), a former editor of the *Grand Forks Herald*, for his editorial that inspired the title of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research documentation and data that support the findings of this study are openly available at the *PS: Political Science & Politics* Harvard Dataverse at <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/AMB2VA>.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research. ■

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