

# 2026 Primary Election: Meet the Candidates

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and quality local products to consumers. Producing fertilizer in North Dakota will give farmers a better price and is a common-sense use of our plentiful natural gas resource.

A critical priority of our Ag Department will be addressing the farm crisis. Struggling farmers must be offered answers to their financial concerns, so we will bolster the ND Farm Mediation Service with more farm credit counselors. In 1988, the ND Ag Department hired and trained 80 credit counselors to advocate for farmers during the last farm crisis. Credit counselors help farmers and ranchers make feasible cropping and livestock plans so that their yearly operations pencil out and they can pass their farm on to the next generation. They also help with mediation related to land rights issues. The current Ag Department only has one credit counselor in Bismarck working for 26,000 farmers and ranchers. This is unacceptable. Our Ag Department will further advocate for producers by promoting mental health resources specifically tailored to the needs of farmers, ranchers, and their families. During times of unstable markets, low crop prices, and high input costs, producers are under an incredible amount of stress. Our Ag Department staff will conduct surveys, research solutions, and work with policymakers and organizations to address the current crisis. In 2027, we will continue our work updating and distributing the Responsible Hyperscale Development Framework. The RHDF is for the consideration of counties, cities, and townships to prioritize community benefits during data center development. RHDF is not meant to oppose development; it is a way for development to happen "the right way, the first time". This includes, among other things: community benefit agreements, which require the developer to make contributions to infrastructure and the community; expansion guidelines; impact analysis; sufficient public review time; a decommission plan; and transparency requirements with no non-disclosure agreements. A key role of the Ag Commissioner is lobbying on behalf of farmers, ranchers, and consumers. American consumers deserve to know where their food is coming from. Right now, voluntary labeling lets the big meatpackers hide that information. Restoring mandatory Country of Origin Labeling for beef and pork will help North Dakota producers get the price they deserve for their superior products. There are a lot of things we need to get done. But I can't think of anything much more important than our kids. Our Ag Department will support ND Beef for ND Schools. This will involve working with local meat processors and school districts and removing the bureaucracy that makes farm to school difficult.

### What do you feel are the top three issues that need to be addressed by the entity you are running for?

We are experiencing the worst farm crisis in the last 40 years. North Dakota production agriculture is \$41.3 billion in economic activity and 123,000 jobs. It's our way of life. And right now, it's in trouble. I lived through the 1980's farm crisis as a young farmer, and I am seeing familiar old patterns. Fertilizer prices have doubled, diesel fuel is over five dollars, machinery and parts prices are through the roof, farm debt is at record highs, and income is flat or falling. The Ag Commissioner has a responsibility to stand up, speak honestly, and offer solutions to the problems facing family farmers and ranchers in North Dakota. Working on value-added ag and fertilizer co-ops, adding farm credit counselors and mental health resources, and advocating for family farmers and ranchers in DC is the least we can do with this office to address the crisis. Farmland ownership has become a serious problem, with out-of-state billionaires buying up farmland. Our department will support strong anti-corporate ag laws. This is a foundational North Dakota principle. We must keep out foreign ownership of agricultural land and keep it in production. Promoting good resources for farm and ranch succession planning is another way to keep land in

the hands of people who will care for it. Industrial development on agricultural land is part of this problem and its own issue. We need honesty and transparency on the Industrial Commission. Data center developers have been taking agricultural land out of production and taking advantage of our resources, with help from the Industrial Commission. For example, the Industrial Commission voted to invest \$500 million of taxpayer money in the WBI Bakken East natural gas pipeline. If the pipeline doesn't have enough demand, taxpayers will foot the bill. The pipeline path coincides with existing and proposed data center sites. The Industrial Commission has placed the state in the position that these natural-gas hungry data centers need to be built, quick, or else the state will have to pay for gas that isn't used from this pipeline. WBI is leveraging eminent domain against landowners. Are farmers, ranchers, and rural community members benefiting from the pipeline? We are advocating for a transparent process that benefits communities over multi-billion dollar corporations. Respect the people or step aside.

### If you get elected, how do you plan to commit time to this position outside of meetings?

I have been traveling across the state, talking to people. This will continue after I am elected. Consider me your statewide county extension agent. I will hold regular public town hall meetings so that I can be transparent in my role as Ag Commissioner, and hear what is going on in your communities from you. For a brief trip out of the state, I will join forces with Ag Commissioners across the country, buy my own plane ticket to DC, and fight for fair, common sense ag policy. Congress is not looking out for family farmers, ranchers, or consumers who want healthy, local foods. I will testify to Congress that taxpayer dollars and subsidies should not be going to out-of-state billionaire landlords like Scott Bessent and Bill Gates. There is only so much agricultural land in North Dakota. We need to continue the legacy of family farming and ranching for the next generation.

### Why should people vote for you?

The Agriculture Commissioner is among the top three most powerful elected officials at the North Dakota State Capitol as a member of the Industrial Commission. I will ask the tough questions, and I'm not afraid of anybody. If the other two members of the Industrial Commission (the Governor and Attorney General) try to shut out the public in an executive session, I will stand up and refuse. No more sweetheart deals for out-of-state multi-billion dollar corporations. I will bring transparency and integrity back to the office. The Agriculture Commissioner is responsible for standing up for family farmers in our state, and I will speak honestly about the farm crisis. We must keep farmland in the hands of the people who work it: not corporations or billionaires.

### Is there anything else you'd like the community to know about you?

This race is not about me. It's about all of us. People have been confiding in me that the current system is working against them. Thirty-six years of sobriety has taught me to give of myself to help others. I am blessed and grateful to be on this journey. I believe that together, we can make a difference.

Public Service  
Commissioner  
6-year term



**Sheri Haugen-Hoffart**  
Republican  
Family: Richard W. Hoffart

**Hobbies/Organizations:** I serve on several professional boards, including the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, where I am Vice Chair of both the Critical Infrastructure and Pipeline Safety Committees and contribute to the Electricity Committee. I also remain active with my alma mater through the University of North Dakota Alumni Association and Foundation Board of Directors. I support military communities by raising awareness about PTSD, advocating for disabled veterans, and participating in initiatives such as Wreaths Across America.

### Why was it important to you to run for this position?

I chose to run for the Public Service Commission because reliable, affordable utility service is essential to every North Dakotan. Our state continues to have some of the lowest electrical rates in the nation, and strong regulatory oversight is key to maintaining that stability. I remain committed to ensuring reliability, protecting ratepayers, and helping citizens understand how the Commission's work impacts their daily lives.

### What do you want to accomplish in the first year if you are elected?

I will continue carrying out the responsibilities of the Public Service Commission with integrity and focusing on strong regulatory oversight that protects North Dakota ratepayers. Ensuring transparency in every decision remains a priority, along with maintaining the safety of our state's extensive pipeline infrastructure. My goal is to keep the public wellinformed while supporting reliable, affordable utility service across North Dakota.

### What do you feel are the top three issues that need to be addressed by the entity you are running for?

The top issues are affordability, reliability, and security. Keeping rates affordable for North Dakotans, ensuring dependable service, and making sure our grid is strong and secure from foreign threats.

### If you get elected, how do you plan to commit time to this position outside of meetings?

Outside of formal meetings, I will continue dedicating significant time to this role, just as I have over the past four years. That includes active participation on regional and national boards to ensure North Dakota has a strong voice in shaping sound energy policy, as well as ongoing engagement in community events across the state. My commitment is to remain accessible, informed, and fully involved in the work that supports reliable, affordable service for North Dakotans.

### Why should people vote for you?

I am committed, approachable, and dedicated to carrying out this work with integrity. I take seriously the laws we are entrusted to uphold and remain focused on protecting ratepayers through transparent, accountable regulation. I would be honored to continue serving the people of North Dakota. I am proud to have earned the endorsements from Governor Kelly Armstrong, Senator Hoveen and Regulatory Roundtable PAC, and grassroots conservatives across the state, but the most important endorsement comes from the thousands of North Dakotans who entrust me with their vote. I work for the people and never forget that.

### Is there anything else you'd like the community to know about you?

I am a North Dakota native who grew up on a farm, where I learned the value of hard work, community, and faith. Some of my strongest memories come from walking down country roads and attending a small country church. Those roots shaped who I am, and I have never forgotten where I came from or the faith that guides me.



**Deven Styczynski**  
Republican  
Age: 39

**Family:** Wife: Wendy Daughter: Age 12

**Hobbies/Organizations:** NDGOP, ND Young Republicans, Sons of Liberty

### Why was it important to you to run for this position?

I believe it is important to do what I can to return the public service commission to its original function of being the regulatory body for the de facto monopolies and to be the negotiating mouthpiece of the public. This mindset of original purpose alongside my square deal approach will help me bring stronger scrutiny on rate hikes, greater transparency and ability for public input, and to balance regulation that protects ratepayers and landowners while still supporting industrial growth in the state.

### What do you want to accomplish in the first year if you are elected?

I would like to work closely with the legislature to fix several pieces of century code that are of concern to me. House Bill 1258 from the 2025 session, which allows the PSC to override local zoning (NDCC 49-22-16), should be immediately repealed and that power returned to the counties and townships. I find this to be the most pressing item to tackle at the start of 2027.

### What do you feel are the top three issues that need to be addressed by the entity you are running for?

The technical issues are utility rates/affordability, grid reliability, and property rights. These are the issues the vast majority of the public want addressed. The Public Service Commission I think has one issue that tops these, and it's public trust. There are swaths of the public in ND who do not trust the Public Service Commission is negotiating on their behalf. When you have utility companies comfortable with coming and asking for a 24% rate increase, it points to a much deeper issue. An issue the voters need to ask themselves before voting June 9.

### If you get elected, how do you plan to commit time to this position outside of meetings?

Public Service Commissioners run a full time schedule so I expect to be running a 45-50 hour a week minimum schedule to cover the required regulatory work and research outside of meetings and public hearings. The PSC has a vast array of responsibilities from mine land reclamation, to enforcing pipeline and railroad safety, to utility permit siting, to enforcing standards on scales and fuel pumps, and many more functions listed out under NDCC Title 49.

### Why should people vote for you?

People should vote for me because I have practical, hands-on experience. My experiences range from agriculture, crop research, and land management to conducting audits, managing compliance programs, performing risk assessments, and enforcing regulatory standards. These skills translate directly to the required fair and rigorous regulatory oversight required of the PSC.

### Is there anything else you'd like the community to know about you?

It is my duty as a father and a husband to help set the stage in this state for families to be able to grow and prosper here. The costs in this state may not be as high as in some others, but it's still enough to crush them. We need to get serious about how our state operates so families are not left in the dust.



**John Pederson**  
Democratic  
Age: 56

**Family:** Spouse: Julie Tillberg; Children: John Luke (17) and Pluto (14)  
**Hobbies/Organizations:** Bread for the World, Sons of Norway, bicycling, hiking, skiing.

### Why was it important to you to run for this position?

North Dakota is at a critical juncture and I want to offer the people a choice. The nation's energy landscape has never been more complex or more consequential — for our grid reliability, our ratepayers, and our economic future. I believe my background as an economist and historian uniquely suits me for this moment. Understanding how economies evolve and how institutions succeed or fail over time means I bring a big-picture perspective to decisions that will shape North Dakota for decades.

We are in the middle of a data center boom, and the decisions we make now will determine whether this growth benefits our communities or comes at their expense. North Dakota has extraordinary energy resources — coal, natural gas, oil, wind, and emerging technologies. Each has a role to play. As a stewards of those resources, we must focus on the future implications of our choices.

Long-term thinking — grounded in economics, not ideology or industry connections — is what I believe is missing from the Commission today. The Public Service Commission's (PSC's) job is to represent the public interest, not the interests of the utilities it regulates. North Dakotans need affordable energy bills and good jobs. Reliable, affordable energy attracts the businesses and industries that create those jobs. Finding that sweet spot — where rates are fair, and the economy grows — is exactly what the PSC should be doing. Ratepayers deserve a commissioner who understands that and has the independence to act on it. It's time to put public service back in the Public Service Commission.

### What do you want to accomplish in the first year if you are elected?

I would establish a genuine public engagement process built around three principles: First, early and direct notification — affected landowners, townships, and local governments must be notified at the beginning of the process, not after key decisions have already been made. Second, hearings in affected communities — not just in Bismarck, but in the places where projects will be built. Third, transparency — project applications, impact assessments, and rate analyses should be publicly available in plain language before hearings are held.

### What do you feel are the top three issues that need to be addressed by the entity you are running for?

Putting rate payers first, respecting local control, and developing energy the right way.

### If you get elected, how do you plan to commit time to this position outside of meetings?

I will work full time at my office. I will be available to the public and will respond to people's inquiries and questions.

### Why should people vote for you?

I will represent the people, not the dual monopolies of corporate power or the super majority.

### Is there anything else you'd like the community to know about you?

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