



SENATOR HEITKAMP'S WORK TO KEEP NORTH DAKOTA'S COMMUNITIES STRONG & SAFE

U.S. Senator Heidi Heitkamp launched her Strong & Safe Communities Initiative in September 2014 to help address some of the emerging challenges facing the state by bringing a greater focus to keeping North Dakota's communities strong and families safe in their homes well into the future. Part of the initiative includes her Strong & Safe Communities Task Force that is comprised of North Dakotans from across the state who have solid understandings of many of the new challenges the state faces.

North Dakota has reaped major rewards from the state's energy boom. The state has the lowest unemployment rate in the country, thousands of open jobs, and innovation, research, and development taking place. With the state's unprecedented population and economic growth, it also faces some new law enforcement, infrastructure, and safety challenges. Heitkamp has already been working to address these issues, and through her Strong & Safe Communities Initiative she is raising more awareness about them and providing a tangible plan to address them moving forward so we are building a strong future for North Dakota. Here are some of the actions Heitkamp has taken to keep North Dakota's communities strong and safe:

Transportation of Crude Oil by Rail

Since the derailment of a crude oil train in Casselton in December 2013, Heitkamp has pushed for improvements to rail safety to protect North Dakota's communities. Largely due to the energy boom in North Dakota and the heavy reliance on rail as a mode of transportation, as of mid-2014, the number of railcars carrying crude oil grew by more than 4,000 percent between 2008 and 2013. To improve safety for North Dakota's communities, Heitkamp introduced her RESPONSE Act to make sure first responders have the training and resources they need to handle potential hazardous incidents, such as derailments of trains carrying crude oil. The bill passed unanimously in a Senate committee. She helped secure federal funds for a one-of-a-kind rail safety training facility in Colorado which many North Dakota first responders have visited for training sessions. She also brought the fire chief from Casselton to Washington, D.C. where he testified at a hearing that Heitkamp chaired in the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security to discuss his team's experience responding to the Casselton derailment. Heitkamp also brought the second in command at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to North Dakota to meet with volunteer firefighters about finding solutions for training and recruitment issues related to volunteer firefighters, which make up 96 percent of the state's first responders. Heitkamp also pressed federal agencies to release updated rules to help prevent future derailments, many of which were recently finalized.

Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence

Since the fall of 2013, Heitkamp has been a leader in Congress working to combat human trafficking – a growing problem in North Dakota – by holding Senate hearings, introducing legislation, setting up training sessions for North Dakotans on identifying human trafficking, and coordinating with lead advocacy organizations to raise awareness about this problem. She played a key role in passing bipartisan legislation through Congress which included her safe harbor bill with U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar to make sure human trafficking victims who are minors aren't treated as criminals. She is continuing to push for bipartisan legislation to prevent runaway and homeless youth from getting caught in human trafficking rings. Heitkamp also introduced a bipartisan bill to give health care providers – including doctors, nurses, and social workers – training to help identify and protect victims of human trafficking. Heitkamp recently brought Cindy McCain – a national and global leader in the fight against human trafficking – on a three-day tour of western North Dakota to discuss with leaders best practices to help eradicate human trafficking from the state. Heitkamp's efforts to stop human trafficking build on her work as North Dakota's Attorney General to combat domestic violence as she implemented the initial Violence Against Women Act at a state level, and helped pass the reauthorization of the law right when she joined the Senate.

Crime and Drug Crime

Heitkamp has pushed for strong action to help reduce the rise of crime and drug crime in North Dakota, particularly in the oil patch. She brought the previous White House Drug Czar to the state in 2013 during which he pledged to dedicate federal resources to address drug crime in western North Dakota. He followed up with more support for the area – including making Williams County eligible for more federal funds to help rein in drug abuse and crime. Heitkamp then brought the current Drug Czar to North Dakota where he committed to continuing to address the growing drug problems in the state, with a particular focus on stopping drug crime in the Bakken. Bipartisan legislation Heitkamp pushed for to combat transnational drug trafficking – a growing problem in North Dakota – recently passed unanimously in the U.S. Senate. Heitkamp also sought to expand access to drug take-back sites to stop the growing problem of prescription drug abuse in North Dakota. She also pushed for the FBI to open a permanent office in Williston which is now taking place.

Indian Country Challenges

With the tremendous growth throughout North Dakota, many of the state's Indian reservations – particularly MHA Nation which sits over part of the oil patch – have faced unique issues and Heitkamp has been working to improve safety on them. She has pushed for a permanent federal law enforcement presence in Indian Country to combat the increase of drugs, crime, and human trafficking – including pressing the head of the FBI on the issue during a recent U.S. Senate hearing, and through multiple conversations with the current and former U.S. Attorneys General. These efforts continued her efforts since she was North Dakota's Attorney General. Heitkamp is also focused on the problem of Native American women and children getting caught in human trafficking rings and has sought more resources to help them get out of these terrible situations. In September 2013, she brought witnesses to a U.S. Senate hearing she called for, during which they testified specifically about these problems.

Economic Development and Community Impact

As North Dakota's population rapidly grows, the state has experienced serious strains on much of its transportation, housing, and infrastructure which Heitkamp is working to address so communities remain strong. She is continuing to push for Congress to pass a long-term transportation bill to help North Dakota build and expand roads and bridges across the state to improve safety and keep up with the increase of traffic on the roads. She has also sought more access to mental health services across the state and helped introduce legislation to address the increase in mental health challenges in North Dakota by bolstering state and local programs. She has also fought to expand water systems to provide clean water and pushed for more affordable housing to help alleviate the state's housing crisis.

Border Security

As a member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security, Heitkamp is working to improve conditions and security at the Northern Border as border crossings have been impacted by the state's population boom. North Dakota has 17 border crossings, many of which are in small and rural areas. Earlier this year, Heitkamp brought the number two in command at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to North Dakota's Northern Border to see firsthand the challenges border security personnel there face and discuss ways to improve the safety of North Dakota communities. She introduced a bipartisan bill to make sure the federal government correctly assesses threats along the Northern Border, which passed in a U.S. Senate committee. Heitkamp also helped the White House Drug Czar announce his new national strategy to fight drug crimes in the Bakken and at the Northern Border which she specifically pushed for. And Heitkamp held discussions with law enforcement in Grand Forks and Minot about challenges at the border.

21st Century Security Challenges

Heitkamp is also working to address increases in online security threats that the state's growing number of families and businesses face. Cyber-attacks have already impacted businesses and universities in the state, and Heitkamp wants to make sure the increasing number of businesses, individuals, and families who do much of their work online are effectively protected from cyber threats. As more North Dakotans have come to rely on the Internet for daily tasks, the need for increased connectivity and speeds are also evident. While 98 percent of rural North Dakotans have access to updated high-speed Internet, nearly 40 percent of rural residents lack access to the newer standard for high-speed Internet – a figure that doubles on tribal lands in the state, where almost 80 percent of North Dakotans lack access. Heitkamp has pressed top federal agency officials about the need to improve access to high-speed Internet, particularly in Indian Country.