



EBTC NEWS

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SUBJECT: North Dakota proposes border-crossing driver's license

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A group of North Dakota lawmakers want to make it more convenient to cross the Canadian border with a new kind of driver's license.

Legislators have introduced a bill that would allow for an optional "enhanced operator's license" in North Dakota. That would include information that would allow American citizens to cross the Canadian border.

"The goal would be to make it easier on our citizens who want to go up to Canada and back," said Rep. Marie Strinden, D-Grand Forks, a bill sponsor. She said the enhanced license would serve as a driver's license and a passport card, the latter being cheaper than a passport but doesn't allow for international air travel.

"It's just something that's common sense," Strinden said. "It just seems like it gets rid of that extra card and that extra step."

The new license would come with an additional fee of \$45, according to the bill, and its features "must denote citizenship and identify and contain technology and security features approved by the secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security." It may also include "radio frequency identification technology" that only includes the applicant's citizenship status.

Applicants for the enhanced licenses would have to provide proof of citizenship, identity, date of birth, Social Security number and other information.

Minnesotans were able to apply for a similar license as of February 2014.

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At the time, it was the fifth state to accept the cards, along with Michigan, New York, Vermont and Washington, according to the Minnesota Department of Public Safety. While the North Dakota bill doesn't mention specific countries, Minnesota's enhanced licenses allow for travel from Canada, Mexico, Bermuda and the Caribbean.

The North Dakota proposal, Senate Bill 2148, is scheduled for a hearing in the Senate Transportation Committee Friday morning.

INCREASING COMMERCE

Canadian visitors have long been a major driver of the Grand Forks economy, with Manitoba license plates a common sight in parking lots around town. And last year, a Winnipeg, Manitoba, mayoral candidate said he would like to see the Canadian city put \$50,000 toward attracting Grand Forks tourists.

Barry Wilfahrt, president and CEO of the Chamber of Grand Forks and East Grand Forks, said he hasn't read the bill, but said it sounds like a "good idea." He said he wasn't sure how many North Dakotans go into Canada, but said it's fewer than the number of Canadians who come to North Dakota.

"People do go (to Canada) for tourism," he said. "There's a lot of arts and cultural events in Canada and in Winnipeg."

The number of U.S. residents entering Canada by automobile has decreased in recent years, from 15.3 million in 2010 to 14.1 million in 2013, according to Statistics Canada.

Bill sponsor Sen. Tim Mathern, D-Fargo, said the enhanced licenses could "increase the possibilities of commerce and the quality of life."

"We're two countries that love each other and have a great relationship, and our citizens should be able to pass back and forth easier," he said.