

December 11, 2008

## **Attorney General Response to USA Today Story on Public Corruption**

BISMARCK – In response to a news article in today's edition of USA Today naming North Dakota as the most corrupt state in the nation, Attorney General Stenehjem called the story "patently ridiculous."

"The reason these stories make news is because they are sensational and run contrary to what people know to be true," said Stenehjem. "This story is patently ridiculous."

"Incomplete stories like this one fail to provide any analyses of the differences among the states, and give no context or comparison whatsoever. This article references convictions only, and only those pursued in federal courts," he said.

One example Stenehjem cites is the Twin Buttes School District; where five school board members were convicted of federal corruption offenses for misuse of public funds used for improper travel expenses. That one example alone accounts for nearly 10% of the convictions in the past decade.

"Further, relatively minor cases may be vigorously pursued in low crime states like North Dakota, where they may be regarded as too trivial to bother with elsewhere," Stenehjem said.

"Corruption by public officials is serious, but the offenses in North Dakota have historically tended to be relatively minor and pale in comparison to the current corruption scandal involving the Governor of Illinois, or recent reports of corruption in Louisiana or New Jersey."

Other studies over the years have concluded that government officials in the state rank as the cleanest in the country. "Just today, the *Grand Forks Herald*, in its editorial, cited a study from the University of Alabama concluding North Dakota, along with South Dakota and Colorado, tied for first place as the least corrupt states," Stenehjem noted.

Stenehjem noted that crime statistics for years have named North Dakota as among the very safest in the nation. "In a state where a great number of citizens know their elected officials personally, we can safely assume that our record for public corruption would result in the same conclusion."

###