

The Future of Local Government: A Call for Civility

Submitted jointly | NDACo, NDLC, NDRPA

Across North Dakota, local governments are facing increasingly difficult discussions that affect our communities, families, and future. Local elected officials are being asked to navigate complex and often emotional issues on behalf of the people they serve, from tax rates and infrastructure to schools, roads, electric transmission lines, Co2 pipelines, community amenities, and data centers.

At the same time, there has been a troubling increase in incivility directed toward local government officials and staff. Throughout North Dakota, elected officials are resigning, choosing not to seek reelection, or deciding not to run for office at all. Some communities have experienced threats involving bodily harm and even death threats directed at elected officials, staff, and their families.

Local government works best when citizens and leaders work together, even when disagreements exist. Civil discourse is an important part of governing. Once conversations become uncivil, the exchange of ideas and positions becomes unproductive and unfruitful. We can disagree without fighting. We can debate issues without attacking one another.

North Dakotans have long valued government that is closest to the people. In fact, our state has more elected officials per capita than any other state in the nation. This accessibility is something we should continue to take pride in and protect. More than 5,000 local elected officials serve communities throughout North Dakota. In addition, tens of thousands of

local government staff help deliver essential services every day.

Our local elected leaders are our neighbors. They are members of our communities who give countless hours to serve the public and make decisions they believe are in the best interest of their communities.

These positions involve difficult conversations, tough decisions, and a willingness to work collaboratively with people who may not always agree. That collaboration becomes impossible when conversations turn hostile or threatening.

We ask everyone to help lower the temperature in these discussions and bring civility and decorum back to public discourse. Treat local government officials and staff with professional courtesy and respect. Work with your local leaders on these tough issues rather than approaching them combatively. Educate yourselves on the issues using trusted sources and engage thoughtfully in the democratic process. Respectful engagement and civil dialogue are essential to productive conversations and strong communities.

We all have families, livelihoods, and deep roots in our communities. Bringing civility and decorum back to public discussion is not about avoiding disagreement. It is about ensuring we can continue to have productive conversations that move us forward.

Prepared in partnership by the North Dakota League of Cities, the North Dakota Association of Counties, and the North Dakota Recreation and Park Association.



Dunn County Commission during recent meeting.

Citizens Support Property Tax Increase Measures

Donnell Preskey | NDACo Government/Public Relations Specialist

The primary election proved again that citizens support paying more for services important to their community like roads, EMS and hospital services. Measures proposing property tax increases or renewal received approval in three counties. Alternatively, citizens were not in favor of increasing sales taxes in the two counties that proposed using that source of revenue to fund emergency services and public safety. Statewide, five counties had a tax measure on their June ballot.

Wells County voters indicated at the polls they are willing to spend more on roads. A measure to authorize the county road and bridge fund to increase from 14 to 25 mills was supported. That will bring in an additional \$500,000 a year to Wells County. Wells County Auditor Dan Studien said historically the county road and bridge fund has been running in the red and the county depended on funding road and equipment needs by dipping into the general fund, a practice that is unsustainable. This was the first attempt for Wells County to pursue a mill levy increase. "I think the citizens of Wells County realized how vital a good infrastructure system is to the county regardless of where you live, and we need quality roads for business, school and emergency response," said Studien.

LaMoure County citizens approved a measure to authorize the increase of the EMS levy from 5 mills authorized to 15 mills. This could allow for up to \$450,000 to be divided between the four ambulances based in their coverage area. There was strong support (71%) for increasing the tax.

In Emmons County, there was strong support (72%) to renew the hospital levy to support capital improvements at Linton Regional Medical Center. The levy was previously approved and was set to expire.

OTHER COUNTY PRIMARY MEASURES

Citizens were mixed on their support of home rule charters in three counties. The measure to authorize a home rule charter passed in Divide County while it failed in Traill and Ramsey. Home rule charters can give counties the authority to levy a sales tax and other special taxes, and to allow for appointing some elected offices. Ramsey County specifically asked to impose a 1% sales, use, and alcoholic beverage tax to offset the property tax burden. Similarly, an effort to increase the sales tax in Hettinger County went down. Hettinger County, which is a home rule county and has a ½% sales tax for emergency services, looked to increase the tax to 1%.

An automatic recount was held in Grant County which asked voters to support the appointing of a State's Attorney. The unofficial results showed a tie vote. Following canvassing, the "Yes" vote won by one vote.

Billings and Griggs Counties had issues on the ballot to change the structure of their commission. Billings County voters approved increasing the number of commissioners from three to five and Griggs County voters approved allowing commissioners to be voted at large.

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Theodore Roosevelt

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Board Member PROFILE



ERICA JOHNSRUD
McKenzie County
Auditor/Treasurer

What is your favorite thing about being Auditor/Treasurer? Elections and tax calculations are probably my two favorite things to do as part of my role (yes, I know, cue the groans!). Although every day is different, which I also enjoy.

Family: My husband and I have been married for 9 years, and we have one daughter who is 15 months old.

Other things you are involved in: I sit on boards for a variety of groups, including Girl Scouts Dakota Horizons, Consensus Council, and Rural Leadership North Dakota.

Favorite movie or movie genre: Shawshank Redemption

Music: What are you listening to right now (or all-time favorite)? Whatever will keep my daughter entertained – right now that’s Danny Go!

What are you reading right now? I just finished re-reading one of my favorite books – *The Last Time I Was Me* by Cathy Lamb. I read it usually about once a year.

Something people probably don’t know about you: I’m a pretty big baseball fan – Go Royals!

Philosophy of life and/or work: A mentor once told me that you can be successful in anything if you can do three things: be able to multi-task, be able to think critically/ solve problems, and don’t be afraid to ask questions.

Favorite quote: Do what you can, with what you have, where you are. – Theodore Roosevelt.



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FROM the COUNTIES

Summer Reflections and Thanks

Hello everyone! I hope everyone is having a fun summer and enjoying the weather!

Primary elections were held and it is always interesting to see the results and where people are for the general election for those that move on. I would like to thank all the Auditors and staff that help with elections. Elections are very time consuming for all counties, and many of us don't realize how much time it takes to hold an election. I just want to say to all the workers in election THANK YOU for all you do for us.

The NACo Western Interstate Region conference was a successful event. We learned a lot about the fires on Maui. The amount of work that has been done since the drastic fires is incredible. Maui County had to overcome many challenges to be where they are today.

Being resilient is the key, along with never giving up and fighting through the challenges we in government face. By working together through the challenges and the tough times and



Chad Kaiser | NDACo President
Stutsman County Sheriff

thinking out of the box, we will come out on top. Those are just a few key takeaways.

I don't want to make this too long so I hope everyone can get out and enjoy the summer and get some sun!

Take care!

FROM the COMMISSIONERS

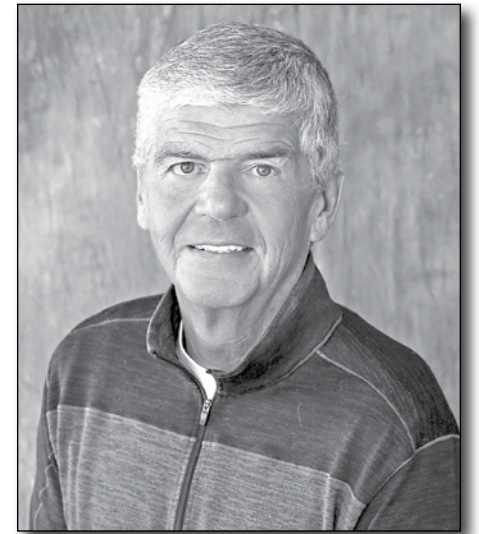
Greetings from Stark County

Hard to imagine that the New Year we just started, in our rear-view mirror, is already halfway done. Time truly does fly! I hope this finds all going well with you and your county!

The June election is complete. This year, like no other election in my memory has ever reinforced the mentality that "all elections are local." Local issues drove turnout and results. For most now, on to November is the next step in this election cycle. Congratulations to all who weathered the storm and were successful in your race.

Your county association is preparing for our next County Tour. Pierce, Bottineau, Rolette, and Benson Counties will all be visited August 12th-13th. If we are coming to your area, please stop by and say hi and let us know your thoughts on any issue that is of concern to you. We love to hear the details of local issues!

Please accept this as your reminder to look out for the registration for



Neal Messer | NDCCA President
Stark County Commissioner

our annual conference Oct 11-13th in Bismarck. Lots of time and energy is going into making your time commitment in attending these meetings worthwhile. Stay tuned for future announcements on speakers, breakout sessions and fun!

FROM the ASSOCIATION

Reflecting on 250 years of Government

On a small nondescript table in Philadelphia sat Thomas Jefferson in June of 1776. His mission was to put on paper what many colonists felt for years. Frustration with taxes. Three thousand miles away sat the King of England needing tax revenue to help pay for war with the French. To add insult to injury, the colonists had no formal representation in the English Government and were therefore being taxed without representation. This existence could not continue. There had to be a better way. What happened next still reverberates around the world 250 years later. These 13 colonies would allow their own people to rule themselves through a new form of representative government. This new government derives its power from the consent of the governed and not from some sort of divine king sitting on a throne. Although Thomas Jefferson might have been writing on a small table back in Philadelphia, he had just created a tsunami sized impact by declaring the United States of America Free and Independent.



Aaron Birst | NDACo Executive Director

We all know what happened next.

The Founders of this country had no illusions back in 1776 that everything was now perfect. In fact, many today still forget just a short time later President George Washington rode at the head of the federal army to put down an uprising from frustration on taxes placed on whiskey in Pennsylvania to pay off the war with Britain (kind of a familiar theme). Also, many at the time still objected to slavery which

would sadly not be resolved for another 90 years. It also took 144 years to allow women the right to vote. But the big idea behind America's creation in 1776 was not all things would be instantly perfect. The big idea was creating a governing structure that allows the people to "create a more perfect Union." That means we all must continue to strive to find the "right" answers when it comes to taxes, services and the role of government in society. That is certainly something counties and other political subdivisions do daily. You all share the heavy burden and incredible legacy of those founders way back in 1776.

All this is to say as we sit with family and friends this July 4th watching some fireworks, grilling hot dogs and maybe having a glass of (taxes paid) whiskey, we all remember the incredible sacrifices many made to create this amazing country that provides us all "certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."



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FREE EDUCATION TOOLS FOR NDIRF MEMBERS

The North Dakota Insurance Reserve Fund (NDIRF) offers many **FREE** educational opportunities to members. Check out a couple of the big training events we are hosting this summer!



2026 REGIONAL MEETINGS IN BISMARCK & FARGO

This summer, the NDIRF is bringing back its in-person training sessions with the 2026 Regional Meetings! Expanding on the previous year's topics, the 2026 Regional Meeting is an opportunity to learn from the NDIRF leadership team about the latest updates in NDIRF member benefits, risk management resources, the claims process, and more!

In both Bismarck and Fargo, there will be one training day for members and one training day for agents. Scan the appropriate QR code in this section to register for **FREE** today!

MEMBER MEETINGS

Bismarck - July 29 | Fargo - August 5

Each event is from 1:00 PM - 5:00 PM CST

Use your phone's camera to scan the QR code to register for the **MEMBER** Regional Meeting in either Bismarck or Fargo!



AGENT MEETINGS

Bismarck - July 30 | Fargo - August 6

Each event is from 8:30 AM - 12:30 PM CST

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North Dakota agents are eligible to receive 4 CE credits upon approval. (Please note that CE credit is capped at 4 credits per agent, even if attending multiple sessions).

ADA ACCESSIBILITY TRAINING WEBINAR SERIES

Misty Curn
Owner, Luminary Content



The NDIRF has partnered with the NDACo and NDLC to offer members a **FREE** four-part educational webinar series, educating North Dakota political subdivisions in digital ADA compliance before the 2027 and 2028 compliance deadlines.

Scan the QR code in this section to register **NOW** for the ADA Accessibility Training Webinar Series!

WEBINAR SERIES DATES

~~May 13~~* | June 24 | August 19 | October 7

Each event starts at 2:00 PM CST

**Event occurred before this was published*

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Geo-tivities for Summer Break

Kaitlyn Bakken | NDACo GIS Coordinator

Summer weather has finally arrived, and I hope you all have been able to enjoy some sunshine outside of the office. With the kids out of school between sports, travel and vacations, we sometimes let education fall to the wayside. I'm writing to share with you all some of my favorite geo-focused activity ideas to add to your summer plans.

One of my favorite activities pertains to using a compass. Nowadays almost everyone has access to a compass by way of smart phone, but do you know how to use it purposefully? A quick way to get an idea is to first gather three objects that can be used as landmarks (i.e. rocks, toys, etc.) and then locate and open the compass application on your smartphone. If you don't have a compass app, there are plenty of free options within your phone's app store. With the app open, take a moment to rotate your phone/yourself to find the cardinal directions. Find a flat open space and place your first landmark object on the ground. While standing near the object and holding your phone, rotate your body until the compass reads 360 degrees/North. Take 20 steps in that direction, counting when your right foot takes a step. When your steps are complete, stop and set your second object on the ground. Rotate your body until the compass reads 120 degrees and take 20 steps in that direction before stopping to place your last object. From there, rotate one more time until the compass reads 240 degrees; then take 20 more steps in that direction. If you followed the steps correctly, you should be back at your first landmark object; meaning you've successfully navigated a route north, east, and southwest!

Requirements for the next activities are imagination, an open mind, as well as minimal artistic ability. The entire premise is to draw your own maps:



take a nature walk and draw a map of your route as well as any landmarks you spotted along the way. Another version for younger students is to ask them to draw their dream vacation locations, asking them to draw out the route they will take to get to each place. This is my personal favorite because it truly reinforces my belief that GIS touches EVERYTHING and you can get as detailed or outlandish as you want. To tailor this activity even further, I encourage those that enjoy reading to draw a map inspired by the adventure your characters go on throughout your book. Another lower cost activity is to find a map of your town or neighborhood; use it to walk around and locate hidden gems you are driving past every day. If you're planning a road trip, pick up a free state road map and use it to navigate to your destination rather than using your maps app on your phone!

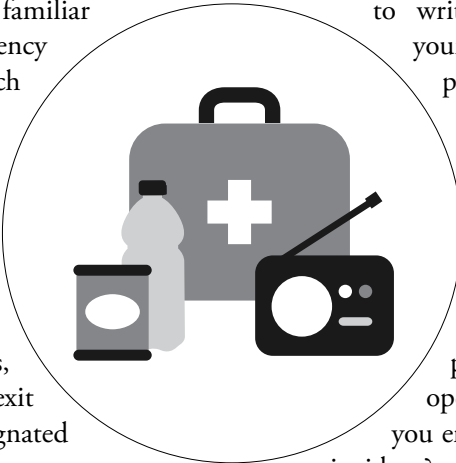
I truly hope you implement the activities described to spend quality time reinforcing geo-skills over the summer and please feel free to share your hand drawn maps inspired by the prompts! Have a great summer, everyone!

Emergency Preparedness and the Incident Response Plan

Amber Schriock | NRG Services Manager

Many people are familiar with the term "emergency response plan," which is what to do in case of emergency. These usually revolve around fires, floods, and active shooter situations. There are duties assigned to specific individuals, instructions to safely exit the area and a designated meeting space to regroup. Government offices rely more heavily on technology as it advances, meaning you need to include a technology incident response plan as well. Because technology is a broad sweeping topic, focus on one thing before trying to encompass it all.

If you rely on an online database or website, a starting point might be loss of internet. What can your office do without internet? Do the phones work? If you still have power but no internet, you could start with your internet service provider. Does the sheriff's department know how to operate without GPS or the internet



to write citations? Perhaps your financial records fall prey to a ransomware attack. Do you have clean backups to pull that data from? The incident response plan can also include a business continuity plan. How will daily operations continue if you encounter a technology incident?

Your incident response plan will need to be adjusted over time, as technology and business processes change. Eventually, your plan will need to address detection, response, and recovery for things like cybersecurity breaches, system outages and data loss. Having a solid plan in place can be the difference between a short downtime and your business going under. Work with your IT department to create a comprehensive plan for your technology needs

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	Jacob Fettig Field Engineer	Amber Schriock Service Manager
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		David Weiand Systems Engineer

Taking Drastic Measures For Safety

In Light of Threat, Criminal Charges, Oliver County Declares Internal State of Emergency

Ryan Schlehuber | Center Republican Editor

In response to alleged ongoing threats to staff over the heated debate of data centers wanting to develop in the area, the Oliver County Commission declared a state of internal emergency.

The commission unanimously approved to have all county meetings held only in the county courthouse's courtroom and to limit the number of people who can attend those meetings, following state fire codes.

In addition, Oliver County State's Attorney Patrick Waters said the commission and county staff have been harassed, threatened and ridiculed in and out of county meetings over the past few months and it has now escalated to one individual being charged with terrorizing and disorderly conduct.

"In speaking with Oliver-Mercer County Emergency Manager Alice Grinsteiner, and in light of the fact that individuals are making credible actual threats of violence to other people within the community, I think we need to take some action in terms of making elected officials and employees and other folks know that this type of behavior will not be tolerated and that there are significant safety concerns," Waters said.

Commissioners agreed to allow the maximum number of people allowed in the courtroom, which is 32, and have anyone else who would like to speak during public comment be escorted by law officers into the room from an adjacent "waiting" room, allow them to speak and then be escorted out of the room.

"Our employees, our elected officials, our appointed staff and everybody that comes into the courthouse is entitled to be protected and feel safe in what they do," said Waters.

Waters assured the county is doing everything it can to be transparent with these meetings and with public comments. "This is not an attempt at controlling speech or silencing people. This is a direct result of what has happened in this county over the last few months to the point that people are openly brazen enough to talk about committing violence against others over a political issue."

The declaration, which is effective immediately, is enacted to:

- Acknowledge the presence of credible and escalating threats of violence toward county personnel

- Enable enhanced protective measures for elected officials, appointed officials, employees, planning and zoning board members and other county representatives
- Support coordination with law enforcement and security partners to mitigate risk
- Ensure continuity of essential governmental functions during the period of heightened concern

With the internal state of emergency, Oliver County will increase law enforcement presence at public meetings and at county facilities, control or limit access to certain government buildings when warranted, have security screen and monitor people at public meetings and hearings and adjust meeting formats, which include virtual participation, when appropriate.

Waters said the extra safeguards with county meetings will be in place while the internal state of emergency is in place. He said once commissioners deem it safe, they can end the declaration and resume normal meeting procedures.

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Vision Zero Students Attend National Lifesavers Conference

By Molly Schoen, Vision Zero Outreach Coordinator - Northwest

Vision Zero coordinators returned from the Lifesavers Conference in Baltimore with fresh ideas, new connections and two student advocates who saw firsthand how roadway safety efforts are changing communities across the country. For the second year in a row, coordinators brought Vision Zero students to the national conference, giving Jacie Pernat of Larimore High School and Zayden Grover of Des Lacs-Burlington High School the opportunity to learn alongside traffic safety professionals, advocates and law enforcement partners from across the nation.

The Lifesavers Conference is one of the nation's largest gatherings focused on highway safety, bringing together people who share the same goal: reducing serious injuries and fatalities on roadways. For Vision Zero North Dakota, the conference is more than a learning opportunity. It reinforces the importance of collaboration, education and youth leadership in creating a culture of safe driving across the state.

Both students said the experience helped them better understand the role they can play in their own schools and communities. Grover said one of the most valuable parts was "meeting all the different people that were there for the same reason I was," adding that the conference gave him "a true understanding of how important it is

for road safety to be in our community." Pernat said the sessions and networking helped her see how "advocacy, education, and community involvement all work together to save lives."

While at the conference, the students also connected with Impact Teen Drivers, a national organization focused on preventing reckless and distracted driving. One of the most meaningful moments was meeting Martha, known as "Donovan's mom." Donovan's story is featured in the teen driving curriculum Vision Zero coordinators use across North Dakota. Meeting a family member who continues to advocate and share her story years later left a lasting impact on the students and coordinators.

Grover said seeing young people presenting at the conference changed his perspective, saying it showed him "what I should be doing back in my community." Pernat said the experience helped her grow "as a leader and an advocate" and showed that students can make a real difference by promoting safe driving habits.

When asked what they would tell other Vision Zero students considering applying next year, both encouraged them to take the opportunity. "Go," Grover said. "It was truly an amazing experience." Pernat agreed, calling it "an amazing opportunity to learn, meet people, and gain experiences to bring back home."



Political Subdivision Registration with the Secretary of State

Submitted by North Dakota Office of the Secretary of State

Political subdivisions and related entities like ambulance services, fire services, park boards, airport authorities, etc., take care to ensure they are compliant with state law. While registration with the Office of the Secretary of State may not be required for these entities, there are situations where it may be necessary.

If a political subdivision needs to show proof of registration for a purpose such as applying for a grant, then they would register with the Office of the Secretary of State as an unincorporated entity. To do this, they would file a trade name with the Secretary of State and select 'unincorporated entity' for its owner information.

Some political subdivisions may have already mistakenly registered as

a nonprofit with the Secretary of State but should be registered instead as an unincorporated entity. To correct the registration, they would need to file a trade name registration and dissolve the nonprofit registration or change its name and purpose to serve as a foundation in support of the political subdivision or related entity.

For questions or assistance with registration, you can call the Office of the Secretary of State's business services division at 701-328-2900, email sosbir@nd.gov, or schedule an online or in-person appointment at www.sos.nd.gov/ business.



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CEG Safety Programs Pay Off for Counties

Michael Casey | NDACo CEG Underwriting & Loss Control Manager

NDACo and the CEG Program are proud of the 2025 discounts they were able to provide back to counties for their work in our safety programs. Each of our CEG safety programs are another layer of promoting safety year-round and combined they save counties between 43% and 48% off their annual workers' compensation premiums, which is unprecedented in the workers' compensation industry. This proves the CEG Program is a major benefit to counties and their membership to NDACo.

It's a credit to what is going on behind the scenes in each county; the CEG team is working to promote safety and save counties money directly and indirectly. Within each county, risk managers are a very important part of the county's daily workflow and our safety programs' successes. We rely heavily on our risk managers to be our communication liaisons and our partners not only in our safety programs, but also when an employee is injured on the job. Our risk managers are on the front line of our back-to-work programs, leading the way in lowering claims costs and helping our employees return to work in a timely manner. They work directly with the employee and CEG Claims Manager Jennifer Mormon to make sure the employee is benefiting from all the tools available to them.

The CEG offers four ways to implement safety programs in each county and show employees that their safety is very important and that we are doing all we can to keep safety top of mind every day.

- Our Learning Management System (LMS) program offers safety classes on a quarterly basis to all county employees involved in the program. The program covers many topics that benefit employees throughout the year and offers the county a 5% discount off their workers' compensation premiums if successfully completed throughout the year.
- The Safety Management Program (SMP) is in its second year for the CEG. The program creates an action plan that counties must implement to correct any hazards identified within the policy



NDACo County Employer Group
Work Smart – Work Safe

period. Counties successfully implementing and maintaining the SMP are eligible for a 10% premium discount for the policy period of successful participation.

- Drug Free Workplace/Annual Training helps reduce risks associated with substance use and supports a safer work environment for employees and employers. With training, required testing, and the implementation of an employee assistance program, CEG is providing employees with valuable resources. The Return-to-Work/Designated Medical Provider Program helps injured employees transition back to work by connecting counties with designated medical providers and supporting our structured return-to-work process. This approach ensures employees receive appropriate care and support during their recovery. A 5% premium discount is available for counties completing this annual training.
- Dividend credits are a bonus for all of us working together and controlling costs throughout the year. Although this is not a guarantee and should not be included in the counties' budgets, we have done a fantastic job on an annual basis in previous years.

We are proud to work with all of you. Remember to **Work Smart ~ Work Safe.**

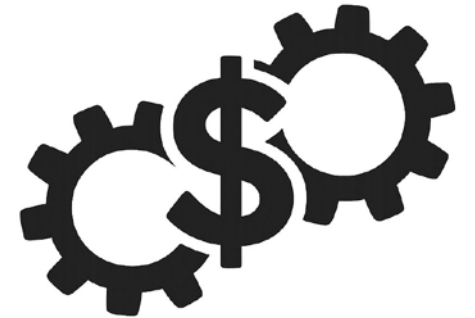
Indirect Cost Reimbursements Increase Under NDACo's Supervision of Program

Sara Cote | NDACo Indirect Cost Program Manager

The fiscal year 2024 cost allocation plans, used to determine indirect costs for social services, have been completed for all 53 counties. The plans have been submitted and reviewed, and the Department of Health and Human Services is planning to issue the second half of reimbursements to host counties in June.

Overall, the FY2024 reimbursement amounts increased by 15% compared to the prior year plans across all counties combined. This increase reflects the importance of accurately capturing eligible county costs associated with supporting social service programs.

Work has already begun on the FY2025 plans. Indirect Cost Program Manager Sara Cote has received financial and supporting documentation from several counties and has started the review and preparation process. A formal request for documents was sent to the remaining counties mid-June. While the information



is not due until September 15th, counties are encouraged to submit their financial information and requested documents as early as possible to help keep the process moving efficiently.

NDACo appreciates the continued assistance and timely responses from county auditors, treasurers, zone directors, and other county staff throughout the indirect cost plan process. The information they provide is essential to preparing accurate plans and supporting the reimbursement process.

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Cass County Latest to Join LoadPass Permits Oversize Truck System Now Has 42 Member Counties

Western Dakota Energy Association

Cass County has joined the LoadPass Permits system, becoming the latest North Dakota county to adopt the paperless platform used to monitor and regulate oversize truck traffic on county roads.

The county, home to Fargo, officially began using the system May 11, according to LoadPass Permits Operator Joelle VanderLinden. LoadPass, operated through the Western Dakota Energy Association, was originally developed in the 1980s to standardize oversize truck permitting on oilfield roads in western North Dakota. Since 2015, the system has expanded offering its services to counties across the state.

VanderLinden said discussions with Cass County first began in 2018, but the county's existing permitting ordinance delayed adoption of the system.

"The initial conversation started back in 2018," VanderLinden said. "Then we really started talking to Cass County about a year ago, and I've been working with their engineering department, the road superintendent and other staff members on a monthly basis."

Cass County officials ultimately decided to switch as more surrounding counties adopted the system, creating what VanderLinden described as a more convenient "one-stop shop" for trucking companies seeking permits.



"They liked that the travel on county roads was a factor in the fees, which is something they did not do," she said. "The easy collection of the payments and the approving permits, it's all online, electronic, easy pass-through."

LoadPass allows counties to issue permits electronically while automatically collecting transaction fees online. The system also notifies trucking companies by text and

email when temporary road weight restrictions are enacted because of weather conditions such as heavy rain.

Cass County issued slightly more than 2,000 permits last year, and VanderLinden said permit activity this year appears to be on a similar pace. Systemwide, LoadPass issued more than 116,000 permits during its last fiscal year, with its heaviest activity in the Bakken core — Dunn, McKenzie, Mountrail and Williams Counties.

The system currently serves 42 North Dakota counties and the cities of Dickinson, Valley City and Watford City. VanderLinden said discussions are also underway with Sioux County and with Converse County, Wyoming.

"We provide support and training to county employees prior to them going live on the system," VanderLinden said. "We also supply detailed how-to guides for both the county and the industry, and we provide ongoing support by phone and email."

LoadPass has also recently announced support for communities through its newly launched Facebook page aimed at improving communication with the public, counties and the hauling industry. It offers another platform for timely updates on road conditions, restrictions and permitting information across North Dakota.

The Facebook page is intended to complement—not replace—LoadPass's existing notification system. Users are strongly encouraged to sign up for official notifications through the LoadPass platform to ensure they receive the most reliable and complete alerts regarding road restrictions and permitting updates. Facebook serves as an additional communication channel to broaden visibility and reinforce important messages, such as road closures, frost laws updates and administrative notices.

Member communities frequently impose temporary weight restrictions on roads due to changing weather conditions, particularly during spring thaw or severe weather events. LoadPass maintains an online restricted road map that users can reference for the latest information, and the Facebook page will serve as an additional tool to highlight those updates as conditions evolve. Set your preferences to "Favorites" when following the page to see LoadPass posts in a timely manner.

The page will help ensure both local residents and commercial drivers have better access to critical, time-sensitive information.

By expanding its communication channels, LoadPass Permits aims to enhance safety, improve compliance and keep North Dakota's roadways functioning efficiently amid changing conditions.

Learn more about LoadPass Permits at www.loadpasspermits.com.



Golden Valley Commissioners visit with NDACo County Tour group. More County Tour photos on page 14.



Moch Elected Vice President of NACCHO

Mary Korsmo | NDSACCHO Executive Director

Renae Moch, Public Health Director of Bismarck-Burleigh Public Health, has been elected to serve as Vice President of NACCHO (National Association of County and City Health Officials) beginning July 1, 2026. This one-year position advances to President-Elect for the 2027-2028 term, followed by NACCHO President for the 2028-2029 term. Moch will then serve as the Immediate Past President in 2029-2030.

Since 2020, Moch has been the NACCHO Board Member serving Region 8 which includes ND, SD, CO, WY, MT, UT. Renae is the first and only North Dakotan to serve on the NACCHO Board to date.

NACCHO comprises over 3,300 local health departments across the United States. The Board of Directors is elected by nationwide local public health department administrators. Each health unit is allowed one vote.



Moch holds an MBA in Healthcare Administration, is a Fellow of the American College of Medical Practice Executives (FACMPE) and is pursuing a Doctor of Public Health (DrPH) in Leadership and Public Advocacy. Congratulations, Renae!

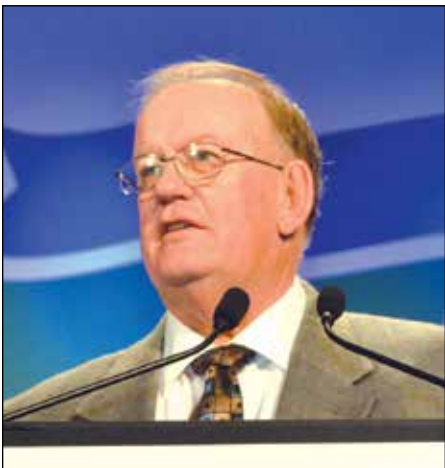
Doug Graupe Lived a Life of Local Service

Former Divide County Commissioner Doug Graupe passed away May 14th at age 82. He devoted decades of his life to serving his county, community and state.

Graupe ran for Divide County Commissioner in 1982 and served 38 years, retiring in 2020. He served ten years on the North Dakota County Commissioners Association Board of Directors, serving as President from 2011 to 2013. He served four years on the North Dakota Association of Counties Board of Directors, two of which were also as one of our state’s two representatives on the National Association of Counties Board of Directors.

Graupe was instrumental in forming the North Dakota Insurance Reserve Fund—providing insurance to cities, counties and school districts. He served on the initial Board of Directors and was the longest serving commissioner on the Fund.

He also served more than 30 years on the Divide County Social Service Board—many as chairman. He was also on the Divide County Library Board. He was a president of the



North Dakota Resource Conservation and Development Council, and in 2010 he was awarded the Outstanding Council Member for North Dakota. Graupe was a member of numerous other local community groups and served in leadership positions. The Crosby community surprised Doug with the Pioneer Award for his lifetime contribution to the Divide County area.

In 2014, he was humbled and honored to receive the Excellence in County Government award as North Dakota County Commissioner of the Year.



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Counties Play Vital Role in Elections

Donnell Preskey | NDACo Government/Public Relations Specialist

The success of the primary election can be attributed to a strong collaboration between the State Secretary of State's Office and the 53 County Auditors. There were 163 polling locations across North Dakota counties which depend on roughly 1,000 election workers recruited to serve those locations. Voter turnout in the 2026 primary election was 20% with 125,101 of the 600,394 eligible voters casting ballots. Billings County had the highest voter turnout with 55%.

Here is a summary of some key highlights of the primary election:

PRIMARY MEASURES

- 10 counties had measures on the June ballot
- 6 of the 10 measures PASSED
- 5 counties had measures to increase property tax levies or increase sales tax, with mixed voter approval.
 - 3 counties PASSED measures to continue or increase property tax levies for roads, EMS and a hospital district
 - 2 counties proposing sales tax increases FAILED
- 1 automatic recount in Grant County to appoint a State's Attorney vote at 50%. Following canvassing, the "Yes" vote won by one vote.

COUNTY COMMISSIONER RACES

- 199 candidates ran for county commissioner in the June primary
 - 98 candidates were incumbent county commissioners
 - 48 incumbents ran unopposed
 - 2 incumbent commissioners were unsuccessful in primary
 - 18 counties with uncontested races
 - 25 incumbent commissioners not seeking re-election
- 178 candidates move forward to the general election

COUNTY	PRIMARY MEASURES		
BILLINGS	INCREASE NUMBER OF COMMISSIONERS TO 5	PASS	52%
DIVIDE	AUTHORIZE HOME RULE CHARTER	PASS	59%
EMMONS	CONTINUE LEVYING NO MORE THAN 5 MILLS FOR EMMONS COUNTY HOSPITAL DISTRICT	PASS	72%
GRANT	APPOINT STATE'S ATTORNEY	PASS	50%
GRIGGS	COUNTY COMMISSION BY DISTRICT VOTED AT LARGE	PASS	71%
HETTINGER	INCREASE OF SALES TAX FROM .05% TO 1%	FAIL	60%
LAMOURE	MILL LEVY INCREASE FOR COUNTY EMS (up to 15 mills)	PASS	71%
RAMSEY	AUTHORIZE HOME RULE CHARTER TO USE 1% SALES, USE AND ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE TAX TO OFFSET PROPERTY TAX BURDEN OF PUBLIC SAFETY DEPARTMENTS	FAIL	53%
TRAILL	AUTHORIZE HOME RULE CHARTER	FAIL	52%
WELLS	AUTHORIZE LEVY OF COUNTY ROAD & BRIDGE FUND UP TO 25 MILLS	PASS	56%
STATE	CONSTITUTIONAL MEASURE RESTRICTED TO SINGLE SUBJECT	PASS	66%

LEGISLATIVE RACES

Legislative elections are held for odd-numbered districts in the primary unless there is an unexpired term.

- 5 contested primary Senate races
- 13 contested primary House races
- 7 incumbents defeated
 - Rep. Jeff Hoverson, Sen. Richard Marcellais, Sen. Kent Weston, Rep. Donna Henderson, Rep. Eric Murphy, Rep. Bill Tveit, Rep. Dustin McNally.
- 17 legislators decided to not run for re-election
- 3 legislators moved from House to Senate and won in primary
 - Rep. Jay Fisher, Rep. Jayme Davis, Rep. Mary Schneider



NDACo Employees Donnell Preskey and Patrick Engelhart work the primary election.





Nominate Your Exceptional County Officials and Employees

Donnell Preskey, NDACo Government/Public Relations Specialist

Behind every courthouse door are numerous dedicated county officials and employees. Throughout the 53 counties there are over 7,000 individuals working for and on behalf of counties. The Excellence in County Government (EICG) Awards recognize outstanding county individuals for their work. The nomination for the 2026 EICG Awards is open now and will close July 31, 2026. So, nominate your Excellent County person today! Nomination forms can be found on the NDACo website at www.ndaco.org/eicg.

AWARD CRITERIA:

County Officials Hall of Honor

- Retired from any level of county government

County Commissioner

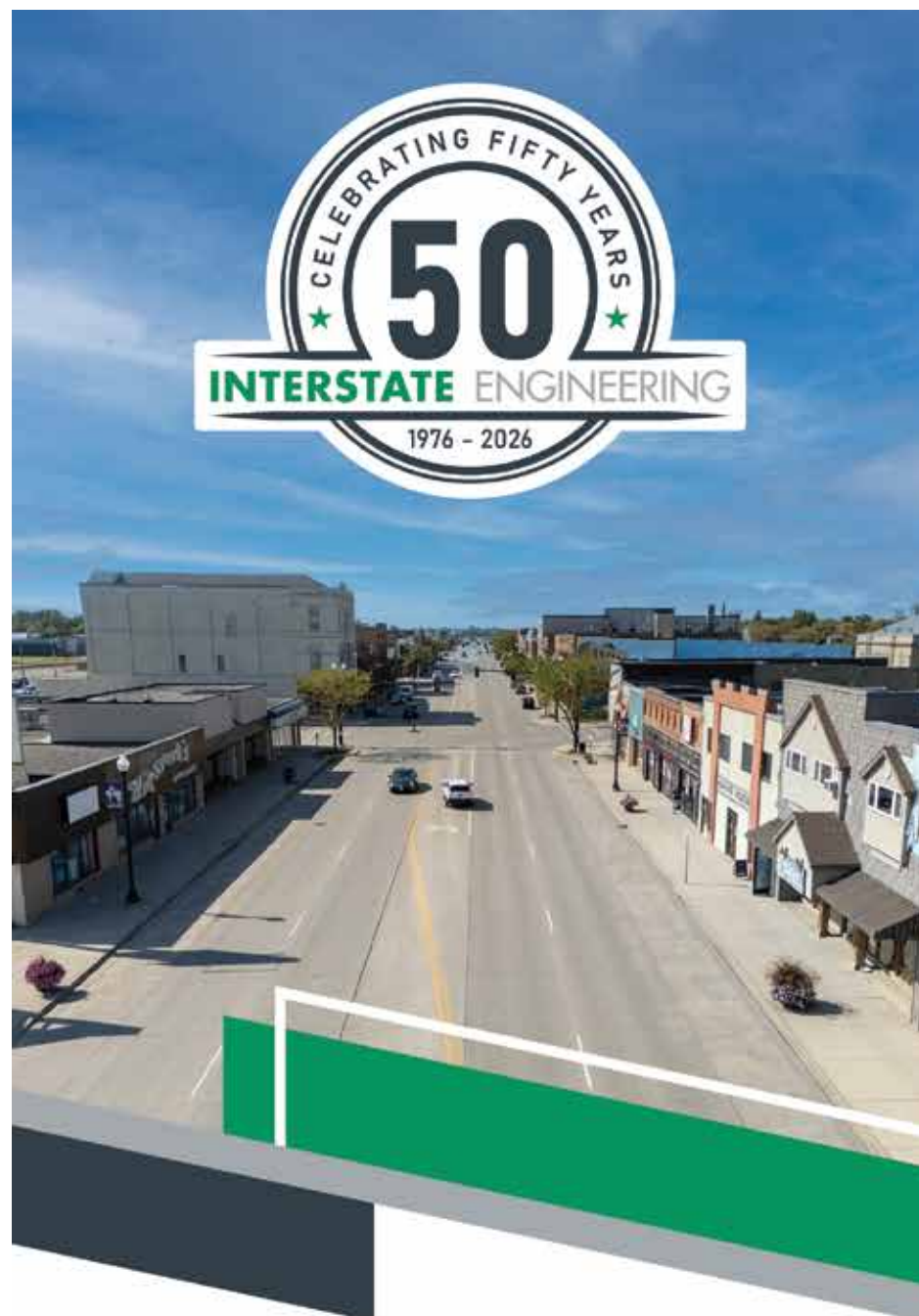
- Current county service

County Official

- Elected or appointed department heads currently in county service

County Employee

- Full-time employees of any county department currently in county service



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NDACo County Tours

The NDACo County Tour traveled west in June to Stark, Golden Valley, Billings, Dunn and McKenzie Counties. County officials discussed concerns with the levy limitations on budgets, data center development, planning and zoning and economic development. Traveling with NDACo were Aaron Birst, NDACo Executive Director; Donnell Preskey, NDACo Government Affairs; Neal Messer, NDCCA President; Nick Moser, NDACo 1st Vice President and Dwight Driscoll, NRG.



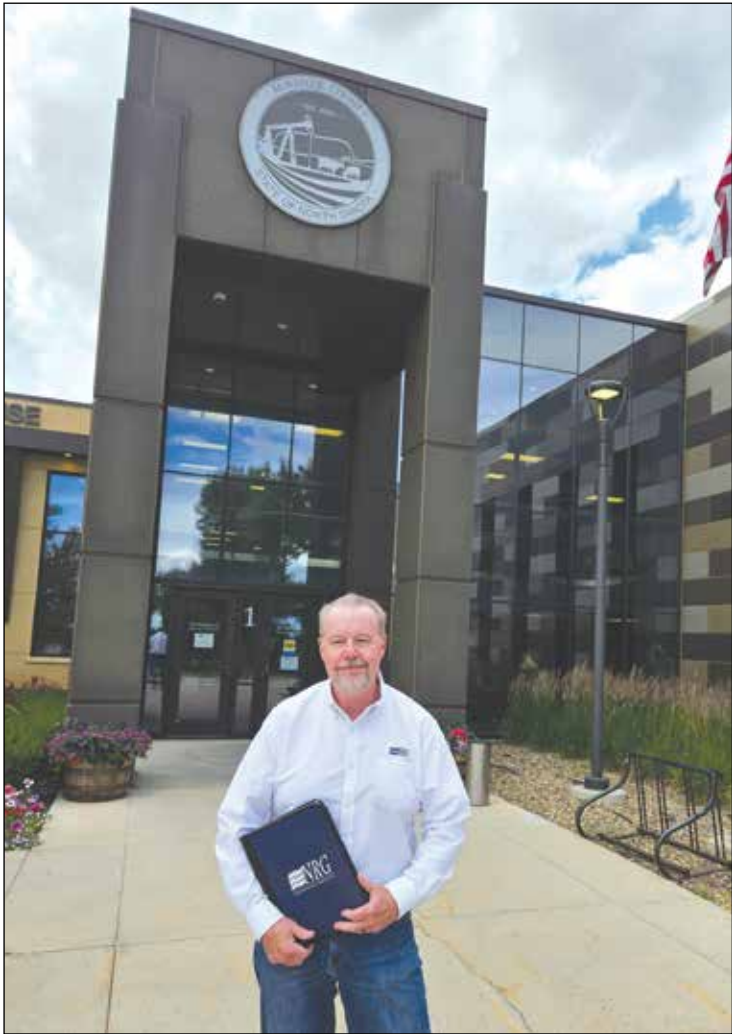
Stark County Courthouse



Billings County Courthouse



Dunn County Courthouse



NRG's Dwight Driscoll celebrates visiting all 53 courthouses while in McKenzie County. Dwight has traveled on the County Tours for the past 5 years.



Golden Valley County Courthouse

Purchasing Pulse Executive Orientation 101

Sherry Neas | Office of Management and Budget, State Procurement Office

Onboarding any new employee is important. Executive orientation is crucial. If an elected official, leader or supervisor is new to government, there must be an orientation process to help them learn about being a government official or employee.

In the private sector, you can do anything that isn't illegal. In government, we have "express authority" which means we can only do what we have authority to do.

There are state laws that may not be known to someone new to the public sector. Executive Orientation 101 should include:

- Review of the laws, rules, policies, procedures and ordinances that apply to the government entity and its responsibilities. Who in the organization is responsible for updating those guidelines.
- Information on open records and meetings laws. The Office of the Attorney General publishes guidelines on its website. Visit: www.attorneygeneral.nd.gov/open-records-meetings.
- Explain how open records

requests are handled within the organization.

- Explain what types of public meetings the organization holds and who is responsible for providing notices, taking minutes, and managing meetings.
- Explain requirements related to publication of legal notice in the official county newspaper.

- Review of procurement requirements for the various types of acquisitions made by the entity. Who within the organization purchases, and what requirements apply to goods and services, including the preference law related to buying printing from resident North Dakota bidders.
- Discussion on how the public procurement process requires an open competitive process.

N.D.C.C. section 44-08-01 is one of the broadest procurement laws and applies to the Office of Management and Budget, any other state entity, and the governing body of any political subdivision:



"...in specifying or purchasing any goods, merchandise, supplies, or equipment, may not specify any trademarked or copyrighted brand or name, nor the product of any one manufacturer, nor any patented product, apparatus, device, or equipment, when the same will prevent proper competition, unless bidders also are asked for bids or offers upon other articles of like nature, utility, and merit."

- If the entity manages government buildings, explanation on the public improvement law, N.D.C.C. section 48-01.2-03 and who in the organization is responsible for construction contracts.
- An overview on the handling of surplus property within the organization, and opportunity to purchase State and Federal Surplus Property through

Office of Management and Budget, State Surplus Property.

- Review of the financial management and budgeting within the organization.
- An overview of how the human resources/personnel management/salary administration is handled.

Executive orientation will position your new leader for success. The Office of Management and Budget website has great resources about government sources of supply including links to state contracts, Rough Rider Industries and State Surplus Property. Visit www.omb.nd.gov. If you have questions, please contact Sherry Neas, Shared Services Director, at 701-328-1726.

Counties: 250 Years in the Making (a.k.a. Annual Conference)

Mark your calendars for October 11-13 for the ND Association of Counties Annual Conference in Bismarck. There will be great sessions, exhibitors, and networking!

This year's theme, "Counties: 250 Years in the Making," celebrates the counties and the local leaders who have helped shape America for two and a half centuries—people willing to serve their communities, solve problems, and build a better future for the generations that follow. The next chapter of America's story will not be written somewhere else. The Next 250 Starts Here. In North Dakota's counties.

Many of the decisions that have shaped our nation did not begin in Washington, D.C. They began in local communities—in county courthouses, commission chambers, sheriff's offices, road departments, and public meetings where neighbors came together to address challenges and seize opportunities. As America celebrates its 250th anniversary in 2026, county leaders have an opportunity to look beyond the milestones of the past and focus on

the possibilities of the future.

Our featured keynote speaker is Danny Adams. His signature presentation, "Laughter is Medicine," is part comedy, part real insight, and part audience-driven fun, showing how laughter eases stress, sharpens focus, and pulls a room back together. You will leave lighter, more connected, and reminded that the strongest teams are the ones that can still laugh together.

The agenda and workshop titles are still being developed and will be updated on the conference website regularly. A link to the conference information will always be prominent at www.ndaco.org.

All activities will be held at the Bismarck Event Center, featuring a new, refreshed Welcome Social in a new location and a reimagined Monday evening celebration.

If you have not yet made hotel arrangements, look for the Lodging and Accommodations site. We do not reserve room blocks, but most hotels will honor the State Rate (but only if you ask for it).

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investing in your *future*,
or building your *dream business*,
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Butler 

NDSU Celebrates 100 Years of Ceres Spring Wheat

Submitted by NDSU Extension

The year 2026 marks the 100th anniversary of the Ceres spring wheat variety, which was the first spring wheat bred and released at the North Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station.

L.R. Waldron developed Ceres, which stands as a landmark variety, playing a pivotal role in early 20th century rust resistance and bridging the gap between early susceptible wheats and modern disease-resistant varieties. Ceres was known for its high yields and stability in addition to its rust resistance. By 1935, Ceres was grown on 50% of North Dakota's spring acreage.

Spring wheat (61 varieties bred and released) is one of several crops where NDSU's crop breeding programs have made a mark on agriculture.

NDSU has 10 active breeding programs, which have bred and released 353 crop varieties.

"Public plant breeding is among agriculture's highest return investments, delivering higher yields, disease resistance and quality to farmers," says Rich Horsley, head of NDSU's Department of Plant Sciences, who also oversees the barley breeding program at the university. "When L.R. Waldron released Ceres wheat in 1926, its yield and rust resistance made it a dominant spring wheat and established

a genetic foundation that still shapes wheat breeding today."

"The most recent spring wheat variety released by NDSU was the ND Blockade in 2025," says Andrew Green, Richard Frohberg Endowed Associate Professor of Wheat Breeding. Another breed, ND Stampede, is in its second year of production and has high yield, high protein and good end-use quality and was sold by 75 seed associates in spring 2026.

"My goal is to continue to push yield and end-use quality simultaneously, while working to solve emerging disease and agronomic issues to make wheat profitable for farmers. Our economic and national security interests rely on successful domestic crop production, and North Dakota is a big part of that as one of the top two states annually in wheat production," says Green.

Elias Elias, University Distinguished Professor, is the durum wheat breeder at NDSU. Since the durum wheat breeding program began in 1929, 63 varieties have been released.

"Varieties developed by this program continue to be the leading cultivars grown in North Dakota, with several also widely grown in Montana," says Elias.

NDSU's program remains the largest public durum breeding program in the U.S. With North Dakota accounting for more than half of U.S. durum wheat production



and consumer demand for pasta increasing, the program's impact is strong.

"During the past five years, NDSU-developed cultivars were grown on more than 91% of the durum acreage in North Dakota," says Elias. "Over the same period, North Dakota accounted for 56.2% of U.S. durum wheat production, generating approximately \$1.6 billion in direct economic value for North Dakota producers."

In 1908, Henry L. Bolley bred the first wilt-resistant flax variety, one of 34

flax varieties bred at NDSU. The state-of-the-art Bolley Agricultural Laboratory, which will house NDSU's plant breeding programs, will open in summer 2026.

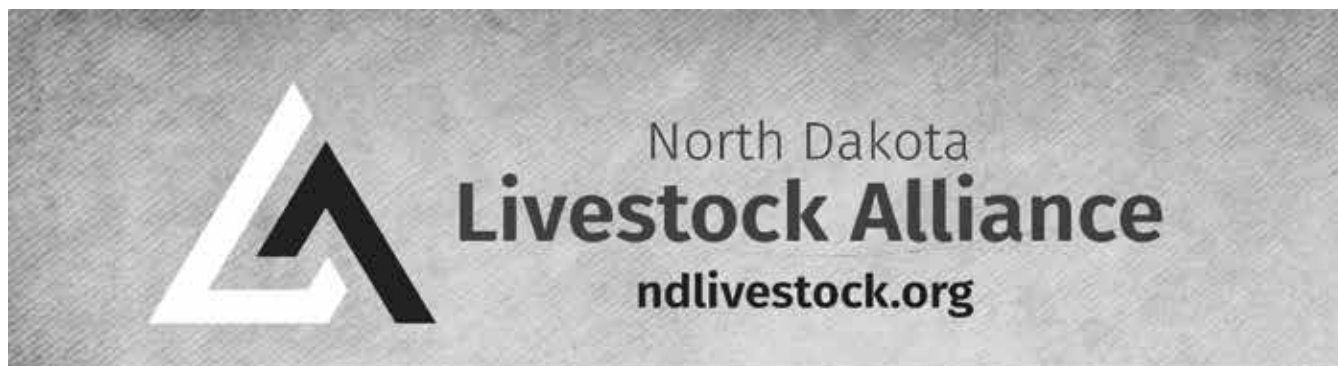
NDSU Plant Sciences Professor Md. Mukhlesur Rahman has served as NDSU's current flax breeder since 2017; the crop is important to North Dakota, which leads the nation in flaxseed production. Flaxseed contains a high level of omega-3 fatty acids, an essential nutrient for humans.

"Awareness of the health benefits of flaxseed consumption is increasing, and we are optimistic that flax acreage in North Dakota will continue to expand in the coming years," says Rahman.

Overall, NDSU's breeding programs have set a standard that directly impacts the state's farm economy.

"NDSU's crop breeding programs are unmatched in scale, impact and legacy," Horsley said. "Our 10 active programs – the most at any single university site in the nation – develop varieties that improve yield, resilience, and quality for North Dakota farmers, strengthening farm profitability, rural communities and the state's agricultural economy."

Horsley says advances in genomics, AI and predictive breeding will further accelerate efforts to develop new varieties.



The North Dakota Livestock Alliance is a non-profit organization led by farmers and ranchers focused on transparency with North Dakota's Counties about:

- The economic and community benefits to welcoming livestock operations to your county
- What to expect when a livestock operation is proposed in your community
- State and local livestock zoning procedures
- Modern livestock management, barn design and environmental stewardship

Contact us or invite NDLA to your next County Commission meeting at ndlivestock.org or 701-712-1488 Follow us on Facebook @LivestockND

Editor's Note: BRIEFS are collected from newspapers throughout the state over the past two months. Counties with news items to include in future issues are encouraged to submit them to ndaco@ndaco.org.

Bowman County Adds to Veterans Wall

A new addition was added to the **Bowman** County memorial wall in front of the county building. Set up in parallel to the earlier wall which honored those veterans known to have served through 2007, the new wall includes names that were missed in the first wall and ranges from the Civil War to present, with room for additions in the future.

The wall addition was unveiled on Flag Day. "This expansion allows us to recognize and honor even more of our area's veterans and service members, ensuring that their names and stories are preserved for generations to come," said Laci Coates, the Bowman County Veterans Service Officer.

The addition has 1,565 engraved names in addition to the 512 on the original portion of the wall. Bowman County Commissioner Rick Braaten said, "When I look at this wall, I don't just see a list of names. We can enjoy the freedoms we have today in our communities."

– *Bowman County Pioneer*

Pembina County Sheriff Terry Meidinger Retires

Pembina County Sheriff Terry Meidinger notified the County Commission that he intends to retire effective May 31 after 11 ½ years as sheriff. Chief Deputy Corey Mortensen was appointed as interim sheriff by the commission. Mortenson stepped into the role of interim sheriff on June 1.

– *Valley News and Views*

Walsh County Awards Funds to Cities for Community Betterment Projects

Walsh County Commissioners recently awarded funds to cities for community betterment projects as part of the county's Self-Help Grant Program. The program is administered by the JDA. The requests cannot exceed one-half of the total project costs nor exceed \$1,500 and must be matched 1:1. Cities receiving funds are Adams and Edinburg for road related projects, Fairdale for maintenance and mowing of city park and Fordville for mowing, painting, and general summer help.

– *Walsh County Press*

Billings County Commission Approves Land-Swap Proposal

The **Billings** County Commission approved a letter from the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library Foundation to a proposed land-swap agreement between the foundation and the Theodore Roosevelt National Park. The area was set aside more than 20 years ago with the intention of providing housing to US National Park Service personnel, although no such work has begun. But with roughly 90-100 permanent employees at the TR Library after it opens, the project is seen as a way to offer those workers proximal housing to the facility. Currently, there are no physical plans, developments, renderings or architectural work that have been commissioned, and those would be submitted in the future, with the project potentially beginning over the next five to 10 years. Governor Kelly Armstrong requested a letter of support from the Commission be submitted to remove any future impediments to the deal, citing the potential to build a long-awaited project decades in the making.

– *Billings County Pioneer*

Ransom County puts 18-month Moratorium on Data Centers

The **Ransom** County Commission put an 18-month moratorium on industrial development centers within the county. The county wanted to give themselves some time to develop ordinances and procedures to control certain development within the county.

– *Ransom County Gazette*

Ward Drafts Battery Rules

Ward County Commissioners forged ahead with an ordinance governing siting of battery energy storage systems. The proposed ordinance requires a half-mile setback from residential or sensitive properties. NextEra Energy has asked for it to be based on the distance between the residence and the battery system, rather than on the property lines. The ordinance will be revisited at a July hearing.

– *Minot Daily News*

Richland County Weighs Animal Control Changes

The **Richland** County Commission agreed to move forward with publishing the required legal notice of a revised animal control ordinance aimed at tightening rules on vicious animals and making enforcement clearer.

– *Wahpeton Daily News*

Williams County Approves Sober Living Group Home

Going against recommendations for denial from both Pherrin Township and the **Williams** County Planning and Zoning Commission, the Williams County Board of Commissioners voted 3-2 to approve a hotly contested conditional use permit for the Cornerstone Recovery Foundation to run a sober living group home. The group home is expected to house up to 13 men in recovery from addiction to alcohol or drugs. Discussion on the permit lasted 80 minutes, during which community members, the applicant, legal counsel and commissioners debated the potential benefits and risks of permitting a sober living group home to operate.

– *Williston Daily Herald*

County Plan to Shift Clerk of Courts Office to State to be Delayed

A previously approved plan by the **Traill** County Board of Commissioners to allow the State of North Dakota to take over the county's clerk of court office won't take effect this summer. County commissioners learned that their vote in May to transfer responsibility of the clerk of court office to the state couldn't start until July 1, 2027, at the earliest.

According to a letter from State Court Administrator Sally Holewa the transfer would need the approval of the state legislature for financial

support. Commissioners approved a new resolution signaling their intent to move forward with the transition.

– *Hillsboro Banner*

Griggs County Discusses Old Courthouse

Three of the five steps to take down the old **Griggs** County Courthouse have been completed according to the State Historical Society. The fourth item involves a list of architectural items that would be salvaged, and the final step would be a historical sign. The cost of demolishing the old courthouse is expected to be high; however, the commission discussed the possibility of finding grant funds to pay for the project.

– *Griggs County Courier*

Eddy County Hires Assistant State's Attorney

Eddy County State's Attorney Ashley Lies will be stepping back from matters related to zoning and Flickertail Wind. The move is the result of allegations that Lies has a conflict of interest with Flickertail Wind, which she vehemently denies having any such conflict. Lies recommended hiring Oliver County State's Attorney Patrick Waters to handle issues related to the wind farm project. Commissioners approved a motion to appoint Waters as a special assistant.

– *New Rockford Transcript*



NDCCA President Neal Messer visits with McKenzie County Officials during County Tour



ND Receives \$27.8 Million in DAPL Settlement

Attorney General Drew Wrigley announced a final settlement in *North Dakota v. United States* in which the U.S. government will pay North Dakota over \$27.8 million for law enforcement and other costs incurred by the state during the Dakota Access Pipeline protests in 2016-17.

“This settlement is long overdue and goes a long way toward making North Dakota whole, on top of the \$10 million previously paid by the DOJ to the state for protest-related costs,” Gov. Kelly Armstrong said. “The Obama administration not only enabled but in fact encouraged these unlawful protests by failing to evict protestors from Army Corps of Engineers’ land – instead playing politics with a legally permitted pipeline that has now been operating for almost a decade without incident. We’re thankful for the efforts of the

Attorney General’s Office and other attorneys who worked on the state’s behalf to secure a favorable ruling in U.S. District Court and ultimately reach a settlement that removes the financial burden from North Dakota taxpayers and places it on the shoulders of the federal government where it belongs.”

According to testimony at trial two years ago, North Dakota’s emergency response to the DAPL protests lasted over 230 days, involved 178 response agencies, and spanned Morton, Sioux, Burleigh and Emmons Counties. During the protests, North Dakota law enforcement made 761 arrests, 709 of which were out-of-state residents. The cleanup of the DAPL camps required over 600 roll-off dumpsters for a total of 9.8 million pounds of garbage and hazardous materials.

North Dakota Attorney General's Opinions

These and all other Opinions issued by the ND Attorney General’s Office can be seen at: www.attorneygeneral.nd.gov/opinions-search/.

WILLIAMS COUNTY SHERIFF’S OFFICE

Opinion #: 2026-O-10

Date Issued: June 2, 2026

Issued To: Williams County Sheriff’s Office

Request: Whether the Williams County Sheriff’s Office violated N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by improperly withholding records under N.D.C.C. § 12-44.1-28.

Conclusion: The Williams County Sheriff’s Office did not violate N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by refusing to release records which are exempt or confidential under N.D.C.C. § 12-44.1-28.

OFFICE OF THE STATE TAX COMMISSIONER

Opinion #: 2026-O-09

Date Issued: April 27, 2026

Issued to: Office of the State Tax Commissioner

Request: Jon Vannett requested an opinion from this office under N.D.C.C. § 44-04-21.1 asking whether the Office of the State Tax Commissioner violated N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by refusing to disclose whether specific businesses have sales and use tax permits.

Conclusion: The State Tax Commissioner did not violate the open records law by refusing to disclose whether specific businesses held sales and use tax permits. The information requested is confidential under N.D.C.C. § 57-39.2-23(1)(a).

DEPARTMENT OF VETERAN’S AFFAIRS

Opinion #: 2026-O-12

Date Issued: June 26, 2026

Issued To: Department of Veteran’s Affairs

Request: 1. Whether the Department of Veterans’ Affairs violated N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by failing to provide requested reports created from its database.

2. Whether the Department of Veterans’ Affairs violated N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by not responding to a request for reports from its database within a reasonable time.

Conclusion: 1. The Department of Veterans’ Affairs complied with N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by providing the responsive reports that existed within its custody or possession, and it was not obligated to create reports that did not exist.

2. The Department of Veterans’ Affairs failed to comply with N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18(8) by failing to provide an acknowledgment of a request and for failing to provide records within a reasonable time.

MERCER COUNTY COMMISSION

Opinion #: 2026-O-11

Date Issued: June 26, 2026

Issued To: Mercer County Commission

Request: 1. Whether the Mercer County Commission provided notice of agenda topics during the July 6, 2023, meeting in substantial compliance with N.D.C.C. § 44-04-20.

2. Whether the Mercer County Commission complied with N.D.C.C. § 44-04-19.2 by providing adequate legal justification for the executive session before entering into it during the July 6, 2023, meeting.

3. Whether the discussion held by the Mercer County Commission during the executive session on July 6, 2023, was authorized by law to be conducted in an executive session.

Conclusion: 1. The Mercer County Commission failed to provide adequate notice of the topics to be discussed in the executive session of the July 6, 2023, meeting in violation of N.D.C.C. § 44-04-20.

2. The Mercer County Commission failed to provide adequate notice of the legal authority for the executive session before entering into an executive session during the July 6, 2023, meeting in violation of N.D.C.C. § 44-04-19.2.

3. The Mercer County Commission lacked legal authority to hold an executive session for the topics discussed during the July 6, 2023, meeting.

Morton County Council on Aging Purchases Former Custer Elementary School Building

Debbie Lafferty | MCCOA Executive Director

The Morton County Council on Aging (MCCOA) has entered into a purchase agreement with Mandan Public Schools to acquire the former Custer Elementary School building in Mandan. The facility will be transformed into a new senior activity and service center designed to meet the growing needs of older adults across Morton and Oliver Counties.

Established in 1969, MCCOA works in partnership with local senior citizen organizations to provide programs and services that support the aging population. A major component of that work includes meal preparation and delivery services, which have seen significant growth in recent years.

In 2019, MCCOA served 51,639 meals across Morton County. Today, that number has increased to more than 76,000 meals annually, including nearly 40,000 home-delivered meals. The organization's current kitchen and facility, originally constructed in

1985, no longer meet the demands of the growing senior population.

"Our goal has always been to plan not only for today's seniors, but for future generations as well," said Dave Berger, President of the MCCOA Board of Directors. "This facility gives us the opportunity to expand services, improve accessibility, and create a welcoming space for meals, recreation, outreach, and community connection."

To address long-term needs, MCCOA established a Site Selection Committee tasked with identifying a location capable of supporting expanded programming, larger gathering spaces, increased parking, and a modernized kitchen facility.

Following the committee's recommendation, MCCOA moved forward with the purchase of the former Custer Elementary School building. The organization will now begin working with architects and project partners to design

and renovate the space into a comprehensive senior services center.

"The needs of our senior population continue to evolve and grow," said Deb Lafferty, Executive Director of MCCOA. "This project positions us to better serve older adults throughout Morton County for many years to come."

Mandan Public Schools Superintendent Mike Bitz said the district is pleased to see the building continue serving the community in a meaningful way.

"This is a great fit for our community," said Bitz. "We're excited to see the former Custer Elementary building continue to serve people in Mandan and Morton County through the important work of the Morton County Council on Aging."

The Site Selection Committee has now transitioned into a Build Committee, which will oversee the planning and renovation process as the project moves forward.



Rolette County Honors Former Commissioner and Legislator

Rolette County Facebook

Flags flew at half-staff outside the Rolette County Courthouse in June in honor of former Rolette County Commissioner Merle Boucher. Throughout his distinguished career in public service, Merle worked tirelessly on behalf of his community at various levels of government, especially championing the interests of farmers and indigenous people.

Merle served on the Rolette County Commission for 10 years and represented District 9 in the North Dakota House of Representatives from 1991 to 2010. During much of his legislative tenure, he served as the House Minority Leader, earning statewide respect for his leadership and dedication.

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Billings County Hosts Historical 250 Celebration

Donnell Preskey | NDACo Government/Public Relations Specialist

The opening of the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library (TRPL) has been one of the greatest anticipated events for North Dakota. Billings County is the epicenter of all the action and excitement for this historical celebration timed with America's 250 Celebration.

Upwards of 30,000 people were expected to attend the TRPL events during the July 4th grand opening with events extended over several days prior. That's an unprecedented number of visitors to prepare for, even for an area that traditionally sees an increase in visitors during the summer.

"When we started meeting about this event in April 2025 to prepare, I realized right away that handling an event of this magnitude was way more than what our local capability was," said Billings County Sheriff Dean Wyckoff.

About 25 agencies were recruited to assist during the eventful July week encompassing law enforcement, fire and emergency response from other local agencies along with state and federal agencies.

"Initially when we started planning, I thought we would have to pull in resources from other states but the degree of cooperation and willingness to assist has been incredible," said Wyckoff. "We couldn't support this event without all the other agencies' assistance. But I also think, they wanted to be part of this historical event too."

Work on a plan to reduce traffic congestion was a priority for Wyckoff who said a remote parking area was established nearby in Fryburg with shuttles transporting visitors into Medora.



"My main concern has been public safety," said Wyckoff. "We needed to ensure there would be adequate traffic flow, pedestrian safety, and the ability to get emergency vehicles to where they are needed."

Planning for an unknown number of people who would just show up was another challenge. There are individuals who had been invited but it was anticipated others in North Dakota and from around the country would also attend.

"In 1949 when the National Park opened, it drew 45,000 people in one day," said Wyckoff. "A lot has changed since then with how people view travel and utilize social media to find out about what's happening."

As far as logistics go, plans included bringing in portable restrooms and food trucks to accommodate visitors throughout the celebration event.

Billings County approved a preemptive emergency declaration which allowed the county to utilize emergency funding for the event. The Sheriff's Office hired additional deputies as well to assist with preparations and over the course of the event.

"Sure, there will be disruptions for the community, but this is also a once-in-a-lifetime event, which is very exciting and special for Billings County," said Wyckoff.

The NDACo County Tour group got a sneak peek into the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library shortly before it's opening.



Dwight Driscoll, NRG; Nick Moser, NDACo 1st VP; Aaron Birst, NDACo Executive Director; Neal Messer, NDCCA President inside new TRPL.

County Courthouses Celebrate 100 Years

Donnell Preskey | NDACo Government/Public Relations Specialist

Across North Dakota, county courthouses stand out for their historical significance and beauty. Steele and Barnes Counties recently held centennial celebrations for their courthouses.

Steele County officials held a celebration on June 13th with a program and birthday cake. The Steele County Courthouse was constructed in 1925 and is listed on the National Register of Historical Places. It was the first and only courthouse in the county. The three-story building cost \$85,000 at that time to construct and has features consistent with early 20th Century Classical Revival Design. The vestibule includes decorative floral medallions. Terrazzo floors are found throughout much of the interior, with marble stairways and column bases.

Barnes County celebrated its courthouse's centennial on June 20th. When completed 100 years ago in 1926, thousands came to mark the magnificent building's opening. It was the county's second courthouse after a fire destroyed the first building. Limestone was used throughout the entire structure. The courthouse features a prominent three-story atrium faced with Italian marble in the rotunda walls and on the grand stairways. This courthouse is also a Classical Revival style like many that were built in the 1920's. The courthouse was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985.



Barnes County Courthouse celebration in 1925



Steele County celebrates 100 years.



Steele County Courthouse celebrates 100 years.



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2026 COUNTY CALENDAR

JULY

- 4 _____ Independence Day
- 8 _____ Information Technology Committee, Roughrider Room, Capitol
- 9-10 _____ ND County Auditors & Treasurers Association Conference, Radisson Hotel, Bismarck
- 14-16 _____ ND Human Service Zone Directors Annual Meeting, NDACo County Office Building
- 15 _____ Artificial Intelligence and Data Center Committee, Room 327B, Capitol
- 17-20 _____ NACo Annual Conference, New Orleans, LA

AUGUST

- 10-13 _____ ND Association of Assessing Officers Annual Meeting, Astoria Hotel, Dickinson
- 12-13 _____ County Tour to Benson, Bottineau, Pierce, and Rolette Counties
- 26 _____ NDCCA Board of Directors Meeting, NDACo County Office Building
- 27 _____ ILG/NDACo Board of Directors Meeting, NDACo County Office Building

SEPTEMBER

- 3 _____ Agriculture and Water Management Committee, Roughrider Room
- 7 _____ Labor Day
- 15-17 _____ NDEMA/NDES Emergency Management Conference, Bismarck State College
- 16-18 _____ ND League of Cities Annual Conference, Alerus Center, Grand Forks
- 17 _____ Water Topics Overview Committee, Roughrider Room
- 22 _____ First Day of Fall
- 29 _____ Tentative - Tax Reform and Relief Advisory Committee
- 30 _____ Tentative - Budget Section and Budget Section Divisions



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