

NACo Introduces “We Are Counties” Advocacy Campaign

New Initiative Just in Time for National County Government Month

By Judge J.D. Clark | NACo President

Dear County Leader,

On behalf of the National Association of Counties, I am pleased to invite you to join *We Are Counties*, a national public affairs-driven advocacy campaign designed to help counties, parishes and boroughs tell our story and elevate the vital role our governments play in communities across the country.

Every day, counties – led by people like you – deliver essential services that touch nearly every aspect of our residents’ lives, from public health or transportation infrastructure, to public safety, economic development and human services. Yet too often, the breadth, complexity and impact of county government is not fully understood by either state and federal lawmakers nor the general public. *We Are Counties* exists to change that by clearly and consistently communicating the role counties play and why it matters.

This toolkit is designed to make participation easy and flexible. Inside, you will find ready-to-use templates and communications resources, including sample messaging, graphics, data points and storytelling guidance, along with ideas for how to tailor the campaign to reflect your county’s unique priorities and experiences. Whether you choose to use or adapt NACo-developed materials or highlight your own programs and successes, we hope you

will join in sharing your county’s story with confidence.

Here are a few suggested quick and easy ways your county can start contributing to the campaign:

- Post on social media twice a month using pre-created NACo graphics or with statistics and infographics developed by your own county
- Include the hashtag #WeAreCounties when sharing on Facebook, LinkedIn, X, Instagram to help drive the national conversation and expand reach
- Edit the draft op-ed to fit your county’s story, and submit it to local media
- Highlight real stories of your county’s impact within your community through videos, social media, at state or county events, and other platforms
- Pass a county proclamation joining the *We Are Counties* campaign (free to do!) and use the draft press release to announce your participation locally
- Wear your *We Are Counties* button (distributed at the Legislative Conference), display the poster, and share materials with others

Don’t forget – while NACo-provided materials offer a strong foundation,



telling your own story is often the most powerful way to show the value of county government.

Though each of America’s counties, parishes and boroughs is unique in size, geography and character, we are united by a shared commitment to service and stewardship of the communities

we represent. By participating in *We Are Counties*, you help strengthen a collective voice that ensures counties are seen, understood and valued at every level.

We hope you will join us in this effort to educate, inform and elevate the work of county government nationwide.

ND Has a New “I Voted” Sticker

Bottineau County Deputy Auditor Wins Design Contest

BISMARCK, N.D. - North Dakota Secretary of State Michael Howe unveiled the state’s new voting sticker today during the North Dakota County Auditors Election Conference at the Heritage Center in Bismarck. Haylee Senger from Bottineau submitted the winning “You Betcha I Voted” sticker design which will make its debut at the polls during the 2026 Primary Election on June 9.

“I thought it was so cool that they were having a contest and that anybody and everybody could enter,” said Senger. “My coworker and I were spit balling ideas, and I thought of the Midwestern slogan, You Betcha. And I thought, You Betcha, I Voted. And a couple of days later I started designing it and it just came to life.”

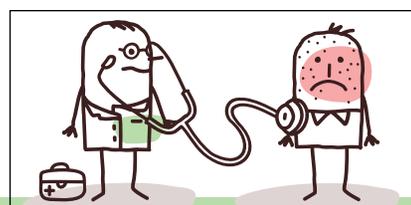
Serving as the Bottineau County Deputy Auditor, Senger commented that she likes seeing all the voters and being part of the process and all that goes into



Haylee Senger and Secretary of State Michael Howe with winning design.

an election. She said this contest is one of the coolest things she’s been a part of and she really liked that her daughter could participate as well by submitting an entry of her own. She thanks everyone who voted for her design and said that all the North Dakotans who entered the contest should be proud of themselves because there were some really awesome designs.

Secretary Howe believes the new sticker is going to be popular with



MEASLES

North Dakota Cases*

2026 TO DATE:	24
2025:	36
2024:	0
2011 - 2023:	1

Nationwide Cases**

2026 TO DATE:	982
2025:	2,281

* www.hhs.nd.gov/health/data

** www.cdc.gov/measles/data-research



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Board Member PROFILE



JOSHUA FREY
ND State's Attorneys
Association Representative
Towner/Nelson County State's Attorney

What is your favorite thing about being a State's Attorney? Going to work every day to find justice for people, and helping the county navigate legal issues.

Family: Wife (Kara) of 15 years and four children.

Other things you are involved in: Chasing kids, hunting, fishing, and spending time at the lake. Also enjoy involvement on NDACo Board and Lil' Cats – getting area kids involved in sports.

Favorite movie or movie genre: We Were Soldiers.

Music: Country music all the way!

What are you reading right now? Chicka Chicka Boom Boom! (I read it repeatedly to my 4-year-old.)

Something people probably don't know about you: I was a game warden right out of college.

Favorite quote: Teddy Roosevelt's "Man in the Arena" speech.



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NORTH DAKOTA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

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NRG Technology Services Staff
See page 6



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FROM the COUNTIES

Happy Spring – We Hope

As a sheriff, I know better than to expect an end to hazardous winter conditions just because the calendar says it should be spring, but we can hope, can't we?

I want to share a little of my experience at the NACo Legislative Conference this past February. It's easy to think of national events like this as distant and unrelated to us in North Dakota, but you really have to experience it to see how much there is to gain from it. I know that nearly everyone reading this belongs to a Member Association that meets at least once per year, and most of you have been to the NDACo Annual Conference. Most of us would not think of skipping those events because of how much we gain from learning and sharing our experiences with others in our field.

The same holds for national meetings, just on a larger scale. MUCH larger. I hear there were around 2,000 folks at this one, and the NACo Annual Conference is even bigger. So, while you may have to try a little harder to find "your people," they are there, and they have stories to tell. That's how we learn and how we bring their successes to our counties.

That's why both NDCCA and NDACo provide matching funds to help commissioners and other county officials attend national conventions.



Chad Kaiser | NDACo President
Stutsman County Sheriff

You can find the details on how to apply for those funds at www.ndaco.org/matching and www.ndcca.org/matching. I wish there was enough money to grant everyone help attend at least one such event during their careers. The NACo Annual Conference will be in New Orleans in the middle of July – could be a scorcher, but a worthwhile event, I'm sure.

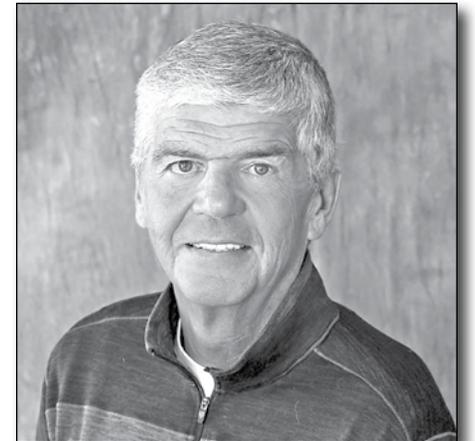
Happy County Government Month coming in April. I hope your county will show off some of your services and facilities that they benefit from (and pay for) at some point during the month. It doesn't have to be a big event, just tell your county's story and take advantage of the "We are Counties" campaign.

FROM the COMMISSIONERS

Spring Is In The Air

As I am writing this, it's a beautiful 62 degrees in the first week of March. With the onset of spring, optimism and baseball are in the air! It won't be long, and the countryside will be filled with farm equipment and young livestock. Your North Dakota County Commissioners Association is getting busy as well. We were well represented at the NACo Legislative Conference in Washington DC, catching up at the federal level on legislation and policies that affect North Dakota counties and meeting with our North Dakota delegation. Please watch for our Spring caravan which will be traveling April 14-15 with County Tour visits to Cass, Grand Forks, Steele and Traill Counties. Many topics will be discussed. We look forward to listening to the comments and concerns you may have when we visit your county.

I would like to thank all who are either newly running for or those who are running for re-election at any level. It is election season, and we need to encourage and thank anyone who is



Neal Messer | NDCCA President
Stark County Commissioner

thinking of or actively running for the many positions available at all levels of government.

Lastly, I would also like to thank Jeff Eslinger, our Communications Director, for his 20 years of great service to our association, as he is heading into a well-deserved retirement. Jeff has been a consistent face at all our association gatherings and will be missed. Thanks again Jeff!



FROM the ASSOCIATION

So Long ...

Hello county family! This *ND County News* marks my 118th and last issue of the newspaper. I'd like to thank Aaron for letting me hijack his column to bid you all farewell. After exactly 20 years to the day, I am retiring. I could not have imagined back then how I would fall in love with county government and the people who keep it humming along as what I feel is the most effective and relevant form of government. In short, you guys are awesome!

The staff here at NDACo also fits that description – awesome! You may not realize it, but there is not much overlap from one specialty to another, and most of the specialists work alone or with only one or two other staffers. I get to be one of the rare lucky ones who gets to interact with everyone on the staff fairly regularly. It's a perk of the job. I don't have space to highlight



Jeff Eslinger | Communications Director/
County News Editor

each and every person, but even if I did, I'd be saying the same thing about each one of them. Without exception, they tackle their jobs with vigor and always with an eye toward how their work helps counties to function as effectively as possible. I am in awe of the level

of professionalism and expertise with which this organization serves you.

The hardest part of saying goodbye, though, is far more personal than all that. Through this job, I have made friends with so many wonderful people, both here in the office and "out there" among you fine county folks. I will miss you on far more than a professional level. I will miss your friendship. As much as we can, let's keep it alive.

As for my future, I am fortunate enough to have no reason to get bored. I will be signing on as an unpaid assistant to my wife's business, which I won't go into in detail here, but if you're interested, I'm sure we'll be sharing more on Facebook and Instagram.

So long. Farewell. Thank you for the privilege of working with you for the good of our citizens and the good of all counties!



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The 2026 HR Collaborative - Engage 360 Conference is April 22-23, 2026, at the Bismarck Hotel and Conference Center (Bismarck, N.D.).

This conference is designed to support local government employees who perform human resource-related functions within their entities, including HR professionals, supervisors, and those interested in employee management and growth. **All local government employees are welcome to attend.**

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Contact HRCollaborative@ndirf.com with any questions.

KEYNOTES	GENERAL SESSIONS	BREAKOUT SESSIONS
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Certain sessions may be recorded and available for purchase after the conference. More detailed agenda to come!

DEVIN HUGHES

The Power of Engagement: Building Cultures Where Every Voice Counts

CAPTAIN MARTINEZ

Your Story Matters: Leadership Through Identity and Adversity

NDIT SPEAKER

AI in the Workplace

KEEPING IT LEGAL

Panelists will discuss trending legal issues for HR professionals and how to best navigate them at your entity.

ADDITIONAL GENERAL SESSIONS TO BE ANNOUNCED SOON!

NAVIGATING HEALTH ISSUES IN THE WORKPLACE

CONNECTED AT WORK: COMBATING LONELINESS AND STRENGTHENING BELONGING IN THE GOVERNMENT
Keynote Speaker Devin Hughes

BUILDING YOUR HR SYSTEM SERIES

MORE BREAKOUT TOPICS TO BE ANNOUNCED SOON!



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State Resources for Making Local Government Content Digitally Accessible

Abby Dschaak, Office of Management and Budget, State Procurement Office

North Dakota is committed to ensuring that all digital content is accessible to every resident, including individuals with disabilities. To support the new 2024 U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Digital Accessibility Rule mandating certain compliance standards under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the state has developed resources that local governments can utilize.

Statewide Digital Accessibility Initiative

The state has launched a unified command initiative to make digital content accessible across all entities. Local government entities can align with best

practices and compliance requirements while benefiting from shared resources.

Siteimprove Master Subscription Agreement (MSA) State Contract

North Dakota has a state contract with Siteimprove under #343-SITE. This agreement provides software and professional services to help entities meet WCAG 2.1 Level AA standards by April 24, 2026. Siteimprove offers tools to ensure that all web content and mobile applications meet the required standards.

How to Participate:

- Visit NDBuys for contract details: www.omb.nd.gov/ndbuys.

- Go to Public NDBuys Site, select State Contracts, and search for Siteimprove.
- Contact Siteimprove and reference the North Dakota state contract.
- Request an official order form for pricing and complete your purchase using the form.

Siteimprove Contacts:

- Account Executive: Ben LaFrinier – blaf@siteimprove.com
- Customer Success: Travis Vermeulen – tve@siteimprove.com
- For contract administration questions, contact Annie Masset at amasset@nd.gov or call 701-328-1721.

Additional Resources for Local Governments

For more resources, view the external Digital Accessibility Hub at: www.ndit.nd.gov/ada.

Accessibility is a shared responsibility. By using these resources and tools, local governments can help ensure that every resident has equal access to online information and services.

Editor’s Note: A webinar on digital content accessibility was conducted through ILG in February. For a recording of that webinar, contact Alisha Adolf at alisha.adolf@ndaco.org.

Meet the Gamer Who’s Making Cybersecurity About People in ND

State Welcomes John Rodenbiker as Director of Cyber Operations

North Dakota Information Technology (NDIT) is proud to announce the hiring of John Rodenbiker as Director of Cyber Operations. With more than two decades of experience in information security and IT leadership, Rodenbiker brings a proven track record of building world-class cyber programs—along with a unique perspective focused on protecting the services and data North Dakotans rely on every day.

Rodenbiker’s fascination with technology began in childhood, inspired by vintage computer games, classic tech thrillers like *WarGames* and *Sneakers*, and the problem-solving challenges of the dial-up era. Those early experiences sparked a lifelong curiosity that led him to build systems from the ground up, anticipate emerging threats, and approach cybersecurity as both a technical and human challenge.

“Cybersecurity is no longer just a technology issue—it’s a people issue,” Rodenbiker said. “Our mission is to protect sensitive data and ensure every North Dakotan can trust the systems they rely on. That means helping people do their jobs securely while continuing

to strengthen the foundation behind the scenes. I’m excited to work with our incredible Cybersecurity team to build on their already robust security posture across state government.”

North Dakota Roots, Global Impact

Born and raised in Rock Lake, ND, Rodenbiker began his career modernizing IT infrastructure for rural organizations, wiring campuses, building networks, and supporting systems from the ground up. He later served as IT administrator for former U.S. Sen. Byron Dorgan in Washington, D.C., gaining firsthand experience supporting mission-critical government operations.

Rodenbiker has since led cybersecurity initiatives across multiple industries, including Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Dakota, where he managed information security for more than 350,000 members; Doosan Bobcat, overseeing North American cybersecurity operations; and Eide Bailly, where he helped build and mature enterprise cybersecurity programs to world-class standards.

Positioning North Dakota as a National Leader in Cybersecurity

Drawing on his blend of technical expertise, business acumen, and strategic gaming (which he’s still passionate about to this day), Rodenbiker’s vision for NDIT focuses on:

- Strengthening statewide cyber defenses through coordinated, intelligence-driven security operations.
- Increasing awareness of human risk factors through education, collaboration, and shared accountability.
- Communicating the value and impact of cybersecurity by telling the story of how centralized services protect agencies and citizens.
- Delivering measurable value through North Dakota’s centralized IT and cybersecurity model.

The state’s centralized approach is key. It reduces duplication, improves consistency and response times, and enables proactive threat management—positioning North Dakota as a national leader in modern, resilient cybersecurity operations.

Trusted Expertise for North Dakota’s Cyber Future

State technology leaders praised the decision to bring Rodenbiker on board, highlighting his collaborative style and people-focused approach:

“John brings the right mix of technical depth, strategic thinking, and people-first leadership that modern cybersecurity demands,” said Christopher Gergen, NDIT’s Chief Information Security Officer. “He understands that strong security programs are built on trust, collaboration, and shared responsibility. I’m confident he will further strengthen our ability to protect state systems and the data entrusted to us by North Dakotans.”

“Cybersecurity is foundational to everything we do in state government,” added Corey Mock, Chief Information Officer for the State of North Dakota. “John’s experience across public and private sectors, combined with his deep roots in North Dakota, make him exceptionally well suited for this role. His leadership will help ensure our technology services remain secure, reliable, and resilient as we continue to modernize for the future.”

NRG TECHNOLOGY STAFF



Lonny Bosch.....**President**
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 Dawson Dosch.....Field Technician
 Dwight Driscoll.....Inside Sales/Bus. Development
 Travis Fandrich.....Service Desk Technician
 Jacob Fettig.....Field Engineer
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 Danielle Kraft.....Accounting Assistant
 Matthew Levorson.....Security Engineer
 Jeff McDowell.....Systems Engineer
 Erik McGurren.....Security Engineer
 Amber Schriock.....Service Manager
 Kay Ternes.....Sales Administration
 David Weiand.....Systems Engineer

Quarter One GIS Update

As we are preparing to move into the second quarter of the new year, I wanted to give readers some insight into the goings-on in GIS World!

The first few weeks of the new year were focused on outreach for the State Parcel Program ahead of the ND Game and Fish PLOTS Land app update. A huge thank you to our county folks! December and January can be hectic, but you all made it a breeze, and we were able to gather updated data from almost all counties. An additional shout out to over half of the counties in the state that transitioned to new tax roll or parcel boundary vendors within the last year.

Hopefully you are already aware, but in case you missed it, please mark your calendars for the 2026 North Dakota Geospatial Summit taking place October 14-15 at the Bismarck Event Center. I hope to see more county folks in attendance as we were able to secure dates immediately following the NDACo Annual Conference.

NDACo's GIS Program teamed up with ILG in February to host a webinar focused on the upcoming transition from ArcMap to ArcPro. The recording of the webinar has been posted to the

NDACo GIS Program playlist on the ND Parcel Program YouTube Channel which can be found at this link: www.youtube.com/@NDParcelProgram. Please feel free to like and subscribe to the channel to stay in the loop on upcoming webinars/walkthroughs.

In GIS World, technological advancements are inevitable and

things are changing; but you don't have to do it on your own. There are always resources out there; when in doubt, just reach out! If I don't know the answer, we will work through it together.

Until next time, stay mappy!

NDACo and the ND Geospatial Program invite you to..

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2026 Vision Zero Partner Conference Scheduled for May 11-12

This annual event will bring together hundreds of partners in education, enforcement, engineering, emergency medical services, and other areas to share information, best practices, and networking opportunities. The conference will include presentations on hot topics,

keynote speakers, updates on Vision Zero, and an awards ceremony for outstanding service and dedication to reducing motor vehicle fatalities and serious injuries on North Dakota roads.

For more information on the conference, including how to register, visit visionzerond.com.

ND Sober Ride a Five Year Success Story

Joe Carlblom | East Central Regional Vision Zero Coordinator, Stutsman County

As traffic safety partners across the state continue their efforts to reduce impaired driving, the ND Sober Ride program is entering its fifth year of service. The program was created to encourage individuals to plan ahead and make the responsible choice to find a sober ride home rather than drive impaired. By focusing on prevention and awareness, ND Sober Ride supports the broader goal of reducing impaired crashes and keeping roadways safe for everyone. The initiative works to remind residents that a safe ride home should always be part of the plan when attending celebrations or social events where alcohol may be involved.

To help make that decision easier, discounted Uber and Lyft ride codes

are offered during select seasonal holidays and major celebrations when impaired driving incidents are more likely to occur. Occasions such as St. Patrick's Day and other high travel or social weekends are targeted to provide an added layer of prevention. By reducing financial and accessibility barriers to transportation, the program offers a practical and convenient alternative for those who need a safe ride.

In honor of the fifth anniversary, ND Sober Ride is expanding to include Uber, providing both Uber and Lyft as rideshare options for participants. The ND Sober Ride program remains an important tool in promoting responsible choices, strengthening community awareness, and protecting lives across North Dakota.



May 11 & 12, 2026

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 Splash of vanilla to taste
 Squeeze of a lime

Instructions:
 Add all ingredients over ice
 Stir
 Garnish with lime wedge

#VisionZeroND #DriveSober See less

Vision Zero ND Shared a "mocktail" recipe to encourage sober driving on Valentine's Day.

State Water Commission Approves More than \$103.7M for Water Projects Across North Dakota

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota State Water Commission (SWC) approved more than \$103.7 million in funding for projects including flood control, water supply and other water infrastructure projects across the state during its February 12 meeting in Bismarck. The approved projects include \$81.1 million for the Mouse River Flood Protection project as well as over \$5 million each for the Memorial Highway Watermain project and R&TWD Battleview-McGregor Rural project.

"The actions taken at today's Water Commission meeting demonstrate our ongoing commitment to strengthening North Dakota's water infrastructure," Director Haase said. "The approval of 20 projects and more than \$103.7 million in funding represents a significant step toward delivering much-needed flood protection for the citizens of Minot and the Mouse River Basin, while also ensuring long-term, reliable water resources for communities across the state."

Approved projects include:

- Missouri River Intake Study: \$860,255
- SWPP – Water Treatment Plant Service WO No. 4: \$1,262,000
- Horsehead Irrigation District – Preliminary Study Phase 1: \$150,000
- Steel County WRD – Drain 1 Outlet Repair: \$110,861
- City of Manday – 2026 Reconstruct Project Area 2B: \$228,357
- South Central – Burleigh Co. Main Transmission Line: \$140,400
- City of Bismarck – 2025 WU149 Watermain Extension: \$457,400
- City of Dickinson – 5th Street SE: \$198,780
- Stutsman Rural Water District – Booster Station No. 14: \$557,925
- City of Elgin – East Side Watermain Improvements: \$78,137
- Souris River Joint Board – Mouse River Flood Protection 2025-27: \$81,100,000
- Rush River WRD – Drain 12 Reconstruction: \$150,000
- Maple River WRD – Cass County Drain 37: \$561,112
- Maple River WRD – Cass County Drain 39: \$513,621
- City of Lisbon – Infrastructure Improvements: \$1,532,343
- City of New Town – Sand Hill Water Tower Replacement: \$3,682,171
- City of Oaks – WTP Rehabilitation: \$558,531
- City of Stanley – Capital Improvements Plan Phase 3: \$339,804

- City of Mandan – Memorial Highway Watermain: \$5,728,681
- WAWSA – R&TWD Battleview-McGregor Rural Phase 1: \$5,454,817

Projects receiving significant funding include the Souris River Joint Board's Mouse River Flood Protection 2025-27 and City of Mandan's Memorial Highway Watermain.

- The Mouse River Flood Protection 2025-27 project will continue to implement flood control measures across the Mouse River Basin designed to increase the basin's resilience to flooding. This \$81.1 million is in addition to the \$389.5 million that was previously approved for the Mouse River Flood Protection project. The project includes a combination of levees, floodwalls, pump stations, diversion channels, bridge improvements, road raises, infrastructure modifications, property acquisitions, and relocations.
- The City of Mandan Memorial Highway Watermain project will replace aging asbestos cement watermain along Memorial Highway between Main Street and 32nd Ave SE (West half) and 32nd Ave SE and 46th Ave SE (East Half) in Mandan. The Project is being constructed in conjunction with the North Dakota Department of Transportation's (NDDOT) Memorial Highway reconstruction project and is part of combined sanitary sewer, storm sewer, lift station, paving, and lighting infrastructure improvements.

The State Water Commission consists of eight members appointed by the Governor, the Agriculture Commissioner, and the Governor as chairperson. Cost-share funding approved by the SWC is primarily supported by North Dakota's Resources Trust Fund, which receives 20.5 percent of the state's oil extraction tax revenue.

For more information, visit www.dwr.nd.gov.

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© 2022 Nationwide NRM-21961M3-NX (12/22)

You don't hire engineers who are "good enough." You hire the very best.

Incidentally, so do we.



There is no B-Team.

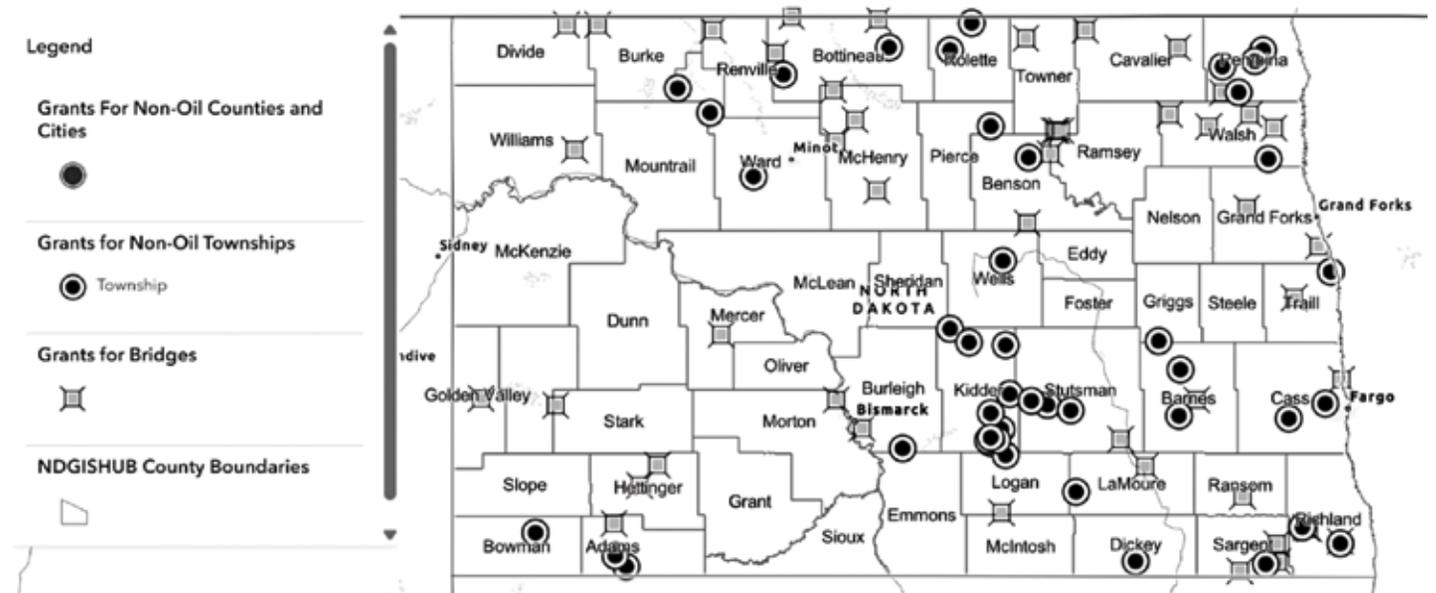
NDDOT Selects 103 Local Projects for Flexible Transportation Fund

The North Dakota Department of Transportation selected 103 local projects totaling \$119 million to fund through its Flexible Transportation Fund (Flex Fund) grant program. A complete list of projects can be found at www.dot.nd.gov/flexfund.

The 69th Legislative Assembly provided an estimated \$230 million to the Flex Fund for improvements to transportation infrastructure on and off the state highway system, including within townships, cities and counties.

“The Flex Fund allows us to make smart investments in North Dakota’s infrastructure to improve the safety and efficiency of our transportation system,” said Gov. Kelly Armstrong. “These investments are critically important to reduce long-term maintenance and operating costs.”

The Flex Fund was established by the 68th Legislative Assembly to complement the Federal Aid Highway program and further support an interconnected transportation system in North Dakota.



After the success of the first round, the 69th Legislative Assembly expanded the program with additional funding and designated programs within the fund.

“This program reflects the shared commitment of the Legislature, governor

and NDDOT to invest in projects that enhance safety, improve mobility and strengthen economic growth,” said NDDOT Director Ron Henke.

The NDDOT received 674 applications for the program totaling

more than \$560 million in requested project costs.

For more information about the Flex Fund, including a link to the interactive map pictured in this story, visit www.dot.nd.gov/flexfund.

Choosing the Right Attachments for Safe, Efficient Roadside Maintenance

Article submitted by the Diamond Mowers company with minor editing by County News. No endorsement of specific products should be inferred.

When sightlines, drainage, and safety are on the line, the right roadside attachment can make all the difference. Crews face a constant mix of overgrowth, debris, and unpredictable terrain that can quickly turn into hazards if the job isn’t handled with the right equipment.

Overgrown brush can limit visibility, while erosion accelerates when drainage ditches are clogged and can’t keep up,” said Matt Nelson, director of development at Diamond Mowers. “Add in labor constraints and seasonal demands and operators are often asked to cover more ground with fewer resources. The right attachments help operators manage these risks with confidence.”

Drawing on years of real-world experience designing and manufacturing roadside equipment, Diamond Mowers recommends that operators first consider what they’re cutting, where they’re working, and the level of control and finish the job requires. Once these factors are defined, they can identify the best equipment for the work at hand both for productivity and operator comfort and control.

The Right Tools for Every Job

Roadside maintenance demands versatility. While equipment options vary by carrier and region, most crews rely on a mix of mowing, mulching, and ditching tools to stay productive across changing conditions. Following are key considerations to help operators choose the right tools for every task.

Wide-Area and Shoulder Mowing: For grassy shoulders, medians, and rights-of-way, clean cutting and dependable reach are essential, especially in high-traffic environments.

- 1. Flail Mower:** Designed for fine-cut applications with minimal thrown debris and high-traffic areas, flail mowers are most productive on grass, weeds, and light brush, making them go-to tools for parkways, boulevards, airports, and other areas where clean results and safety come first.
 - **Flail mowers** are characterized by a horizontal, rotating drum fitted with numerous free-swinging, knife-like “flails”. Unlike rotary mowers, flail mowers chop material into fine mulch, reducing debris projectiles and leaving a cleaner, more evenly distributed cut.
 - **Rotary Mower:** Built for speed and power, a rotary mower is another strong choice for cutting grass, weeds, and brush.



Units with smart hydraulics can help stabilize temperatures and reduce chaff buildup, while those with durable blade and disc designs can improve longevity and reduce time spent on maintenance.

- **Boom Mower:** Boom mowers add precision and stability for long mowing runs and uneven shoulders. If the head is mounted between the axles, operators can take advantage of a more balanced weight, improved traction, and enhanced performance on slopes and soft ground. By extending reach and improving visibility from inside the cab, some boom setups

can also help reduce operator fatigue and improve consistency throughout the workday. Boom mowers are mounted on tractors or machinery, featuring a long, articulating arm designed to reach difficult or hazardous areas.

- 2. Brush, Limb, and Tree Control:** When roadside vegetation becomes dense and woody, mulching attachments offer the power and control needed to keep the right-of-way clear and can reduce the need for additional handling or cleanup. “Mulching is a practical option when crews need to process material on the

Continued on page 22

National Association of Counties Leadership Development:

Learn From The Best!

Congratulations 2025 Graduates! Scholarships are still available for you and your team.

Join over 15,000 county leaders already benefiting from the effectiveness of the NACo Leadership Academy, the **10-week, online leadership program** founded by General Colin Powell.

We would like to acknowledge and congratulate the North Dakota graduates of 2025:

- Allyssa Hoff, Legal Assistant, Cass County
- Amber Higgins, Weed Officer, McKenzie County
- Casidy Heilman, Restitution Supervisor, Cass County
- Cassi Peterson, Office Administrator, Williams County
- Catlin Solum, Communications Director, Cass County
- Diane Davies-Luger, Assistant State's Attorney, Cass County
- Lea Dunn, Director of Tax Equalization, Williams County
- Michael Miller, IT Coordinator, Dunn County
- Michelle Romans, Director, Williams County
- Scott Franke, Deputy Jail Administrator, Stutsman County
- Tracy Peters, HR Director / Assistant Administrator, Cass County
- Tyrell Thiessen, Road Supervisor, Mountrail County

Enroll now for April 2026!

Our April Cohorts are right around the corner. Join us in investing in the workforce – empowering them to become better leaders today and into the future.

Developed by General Colin Powell, the Professional Development Academy and NACo, the High Performance Leadership Academy is an online 12-week program that helps your workforce develop fundamental, practical leadership skills to deliver results for counties and our residents.

“I Voted” Sticker

Continued from page 1

North Dakota voters. “The tone of the sticker is upbeat and fun. Elections are competitions of ideas and candidates and personalities. But the actual process and participation should be fun. In the United States we are so lucky, we get to decide our leaders. Our leaders are our friends, our neighbors, our family. And people should have fun participating in democracy and this new sticker embodies all of that.”

The “I Voted – More than Just a Sticker” contest is part of a broader civic engagement initiative by the North Dakota Office of the Secretary of State to encourage citizen interest in elections and voting. Designs were submitted by 478 artists of all ages and skill levels from all corners of the state. Four finalists were selected and then 4,792 North Dakotans



The winning "I Voted" sticker design.

voted to decide the winner. The Office of the Secretary of State is seeing this as a sign that people care about North Dakota elections and are excited to participate in the civic process.



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Institute of Local Government Upcoming Webinars

The Institute of Local Government has been providing quality education services since 1995. ILG has continuously grown to meet the changing needs of local government officials, and now offers a large selection of topics for non-government participants as well.

- **March 18, 2026**
Using Social Media for Community Engagement
- **March 25, 2026**
Meet FirstLink
- **April 01, 2026**
CEG Monthly Safety Moment: Worst Case Scenario – Fire
- **April 08, 2026**
Got 15?! Office of State Tax Commissioner Monthly Webinar - April
- **April 22, 2026**
HR Collaborative Conference for Local Government
(April 22 & 23 Bismarck)

To register go to:

www.ndaco.org/programs_and_services/institute-of-local-government-ilg/

Apply Now: 2026-2027 NDACo Scholarships



Since 1998, NDACo has been granting scholarships to children and grandchildren (ages 17-22) of county officials and employees who are undergraduates attending an accredited college or technical school in North Dakota.

Thanks to the generous contributions of county donors, we are now able to grant SIX scholarships of \$2,000 each.

Online application form at www.ndaco.org/scholarship.
Deadline: May 22, 2026.



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A program of the Institute of Local Government



NDACE Nominating Committee Chair Dana Larsen, awards Richland County Engineer Jesse Sedler the Engineer of the Year Award.

ND Association of County Engineers Recognizes Richland County Engineer

Grand Forks, ND - The North Dakota Association of County Engineers (NDACE) awarded Jesse Sedler, Richland County Highway Engineer, the 2026 Highway Engineer of the Year Award. The annual award is given to an individual who represents the very best of our profession. This honor is reserved for someone who demonstrates exceptional engineering performance, innovative problem solving, strong leadership, mentorship, community involvement, and meaningful contributions to NDACE, to county government, and to the engineering profession as a whole.

“Jesse Sedler has built a career defined by service, resilience, and a deep commitment to the people and communities he supports. His work has strengthened county infrastructure, improved public safety, and advanced the capabilities of his department in ways that will benefit residents for decades to come” shared Dana Larsen, Chair of the NDACE Nominating Committee.

In his eight plus years serving Richland County, he oversees a team of 20 employees and has implemented major operational improvements, from expanding plow routes for faster

and more efficient snow removal to coordinating the installation of GPS tracking equipment. His understanding of his county’s transportation network of almost 250 miles of paved roads, 280 miles of gravel roads, and more than 400 structures, allows him to anticipate issues, track conditions, and ensure the county remains safe and functional year round.

One of his biggest challenges and accomplishments was in 2021 when the Richland County Highway Department lost their main highway department shop in Hankinson to a devastating fire—destroying plow trucks, motor graders, a payloader, and nearly all mechanical tools. Under his leadership, employees were relocated, operations continued, and the county stayed informed through every challenge, from supply chain delays to the demands of harsh winter weather. For more than two and a half years, the department operated without a flagship shop. But on August 1, 2023 the county celebrated a triumphant reopening, a brand new facility. Jesse cut the ribbon himself, marking not just the opening of a building, but the culmination of years of perseverance.



The Houston Engineering Team accepts the Friends of NDACE Award at the 2026 County Roads Conference.

76th Annual NDACE County Roads Conference

Genny Dienstmann | NDACE Executive Director

Over 160 attendees and 50 vendors journeyed to Grand Forks for 76th NDACE County Roads Conference January 28-30. National Association of County Engineers Executive Director Kevan Stone kicked off the conference sharing legislative priorities on a national level and the impact NACE is making to help Congress understand the infrastructure and transportation needs on a local level across the country.

Keynote speaker Jay Gubrud shared practical tools in eliminating everyday roadblocks to accelerate success. Other topics covered in workshops included autonomous trucks, hot-in-place recycling, 3D printed culverts and roundabouts.

All presentations can be found on the NDACE website at www.ndace.org/convention.

This year’s Engineer of the Year was awarded to Jesse Sedler, Richland County Engineer. (See accompanying article and photo.)

NDACE also awarded Houston Engineering the Friends of NDACE Award for their strong partnership with counties, other government entities and consulting firms.

Three scholarships were also awarded to North Dakota students specializing in civil engineering and construction management technology totaling \$6,500. Scholarship details and application can be found at www.ndace.org/scholarship.

Seeing your needs from a *financial* PERSPECTIVE

“Financial plans are more than just about money. They’re really about education and providing you with the knowledge you need to make the best decisions for your community.”

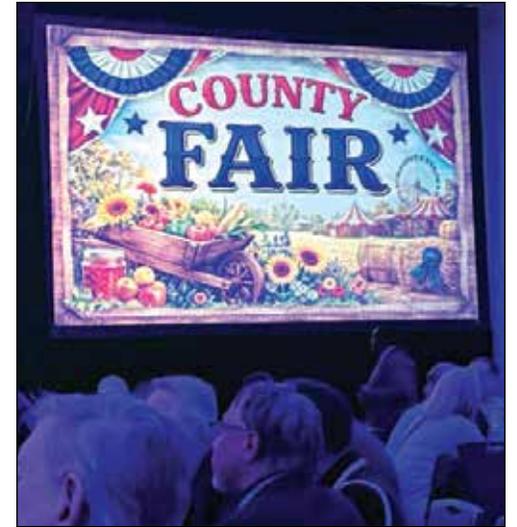
Miranda Kleven, PE,
AE2S Special Projects Engineer

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North Dakota county folks visiting the capitol. Front Row: Tracey Dolezal (Dunn), Jim Kapitan (Cass), Jayme Tenneson (Griggs), Alicia Hildebrand (Cass), Sarah Heinle (Cass), Kim Jacobson (Agassiz Valley). Back Row: Donnell Preskey (NDACo), Linda Svihovec (NDACo), Robert Wilson (Cass), Chad Kaiser (Stutsman), Ben Tompkins (Stutsman), Emily Sievertson, and Aaron Birst.



We're not saying that NACo is copying NDACo's theme from our 2025 conference, but...



Team ND visiting with Representative Julie Fedorchak.



Team ND visiting with Senator John Hoeven.

NACo Kicks off 2026 Legislative Conference, Unveils 'We Are Counties' Message

Mary Ann Barton | County News Editor & Senior Writer

More than 2,000 county officials from across the nation visited Washington, D.C., for the NACo 2026 Legislative Conference, at the Washington Hilton Feb. 21-24. The conference provides county officials with a forum to engage directly with federal policymakers, share local perspectives and shape discussions on national issues with significant local impact.

Over several days, attendees explored hot topics in workshops, steering committee meetings, general sessions and conference-wide receptions. Pre-conference events were scheduled on Feb. 20 including a technology innovation forum and disaster response and recovery training.

The multi-day conference focused on a broad range of federal policy issues affecting counties, including disaster reform, energy, land use, artificial intelligence and emerging technologies.

Additional key topics included Surface Transportation Reauthorization, local preemption efforts related to permitting and property taxes, and implementation of H.R. 1 as it pertains

to Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Attendees gathered for two General Sessions, where they heard from a number of high-profile speakers including NACo President J.D. Clark of Wise County, Texas as well as Cabinet secretaries and members of Congress.

Monday, Feb. 23 speakers included:

- House Majority Whip Tom Emmer (R-Minn.), who represents Minnesota's 6th Congressional District
- U.S. Rep. Andrea Salinas (D-Ore.), a member of the House Agriculture and House Science, Space and Technology committees and co-chair of the bipartisan Mental Health Caucus

Tuesday, Feb. 24 speakers included:

- Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lee Zeldin
- Rep. Bruce Westerman (R-Ark.), chair of the House Committee on Natural Resources

Members of NACo's policy steering committees explored an array of domestic policy issues. These committees

meet at least twice each year to review and make recommendations on public policy issues and legislation. The policy development process initiated by the steering committees is the foundation for the American County Platform, which drives NACo's advocacy work.

Several NACo caucuses hosted specialized discussions with federal leaders.

- The Large Urban County Caucus heard from Ronnie Kurtz, assistant secretary at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and Matt Squeri, senior advisor in the State Department's Office of China Coordination.
- The Midsize County Caucus received an update from Connor Torossian, associate administrator at the Federal Transit Administration.
- The Rural Action Caucus met with Robert Hyman, director of Infrastructure Implementation at the U.S. Department of Transportation.

A unique opportunity at the conference was the NACo Federal Agency Expo on Monday, Feb. 23, when county officials met one-on-one with federal representatives.

The expo is the only event of its kind to bring together more than 100 federal officials from dozens of agencies in a single setting dedicated specifically to engaging with county leaders.

We Are Counties

During the conference, NACo unveiled a national three-year, multimillion-dollar education campaign. Titled "We Are Counties," the \$3.5 million initiative is designed to educate policymakers and the public about the full scope of county responsibilities — from disaster mitigation and affordable housing to broadband access and healthcare. The campaign targets three key audiences: state and federal policymakers, the general public and NACo members, serving both educational and information-sharing purposes. See story p. 1.

Where Are They Now

Ann Estvold | NDACo Communications

A County News profile of past scholarship winners

Courtney Leben-Perez, daughter of Burleigh County Sheriff Kelly Leben, received the scholarship in 2018. She graduated from the University of North Dakota with a bachelor's and master's degree in social work in 2022.

Courtney worked as a Mental Health Therapist at Solutions Behavioral Healthcare Professionals in Bismarck. Having finished her clinical social work supervision, she is now a fully licensed clinical social worker.

"My father's career in law enforcement has modeled a lifestyle that is dedicated to the service of others and the importance of teamwork within the agency. Throughout my life, I have witnessed firsthand the dedication that my father has to the wellbeing of individuals and the overall cohesion of our community. His passion for his career and the comradery within the department was definitely something I wanted to experience for myself when I began my career," said Courtney.

Courtney's most recent big news is that she married Daniel Perez in October 2025! In her free time, she likes to travel, read, spend time outdoors and hang out with her four-year-old nephew. "North Dakota summers are beautiful, so one of my favorite things to do is reading a book outside in the mornings."

"I am so grateful for this scholarship. I have always been passionate about my schooling, but scholarships like this are what help to turn my passion into reality. I love what I do for my career and am grateful for my parents who were always role models for me, as well as members of the scholarship committee who believed in supporting myself and other students in our community."

I am very proud of that accomplishment and appreciate the



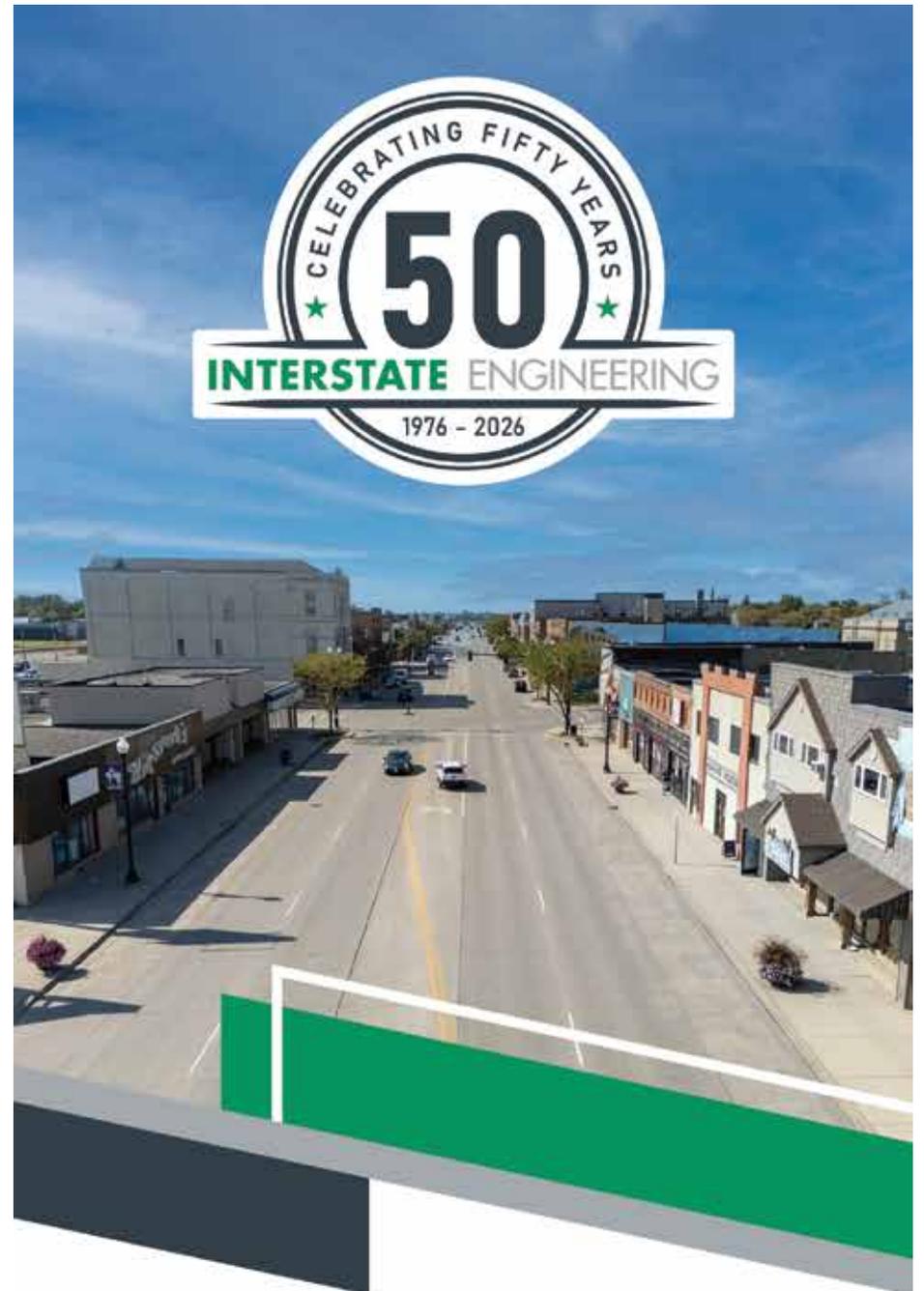
Courtney Leben-Perez

opportunities this scholarship has provided for me!

The NDACo/ILG scholarship fund is supported by county donors from across the state and corporate sponsors like Nationwide Retirement Solutions. Thanks to their generosity, annual awards have grown from \$500 to \$2,000, totaling more than \$100,000 in scholarships.

The scholarship program was created in 1998 to assist county families with college costs. At the time of application, students must be a child or grandchild of a current North Dakota County employee or county official. They also must be registered as a full-time undergraduate student in an accredited North Dakota university, college or vocational/technical certification program. Further details can be found at www.ndaco.org/scholarship.

If your child or grandchild earned a scholarship in the past and you would like us to contact them, send their name and contact details to ndaco@ndaco.org.



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NDACo Scholarships**

Since 1998, NDACo has been granting scholarships to children and grandchildren (ages 17-22) of county officials and employees who are undergraduates attending an accredited college or technical school in North Dakota.

Thanks to the generous contributions of county donors, we are now able to grant SIX scholarships of \$2,000 each.

Online application form at www.ndaco.org/scholarship.
Deadline: May 22, 2026.

Purchasing Pulse

New NDBuys Procurement System is Live

By: Abby Dschaak, Office of Management and Budget, State Procurement Office

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) State Procurement Office is excited to announce that NDBuys officially launched in December 2025! This marks a major milestone as we transition from the State Procurement Online (SPO Online) system to a new streamlined solution.

For more than 20 years, SPO Online has served as the hub for state bidding opportunities and cooperative purchasing contracts. While SPO Online has been a reliable resource, technology and procurement needs have changed and NDBuys is designed to meet those needs.

What is NDBuys?

NDBuys is an Ivalua system implemented by KPMG, Inc. It offers enhanced functionality for state agencies and higher education, including:

- **Solicitations** – State agencies and higher education institutions will post bids, Requests for Proposals, Requests for Qualifications, and Public Improvement notices (in addition to any legally required newspaper advertising).

NDBuys



North Dakota is transitioning its procurement activities - solicitations (bidding), supplier registration, and contract management - to NDBuys, powered by the Ivalua platform. **During this transition, solicitations and contracts will be posted in both NDBuys and SPO Online.**

To participate in new solicitations and receive automatic email notifications, suppliers must be registered in NDBuys and have selected relevant commodity codes.

If you were previously a bidder in SPO Online, you are now considered a supplier in NDBuys. Please log in to verify your account and confirm that we transferred your information correctly. Our commodity code list has been refreshed, so additional selections may be necessary.

[Solicitations posted in SPO Online.](#)

[Solicitations posted in NDBuys](#) (found here after completing the captcha).

- **State Contracts** – Cooperative purchasing contracts are now available in NDBuys for viewing by all North Dakota government entities and political subdivisions. NDBuys will be the first enterprise contract management solution available to all state agencies and institutions.

What's Next?

We are currently in a transition

period as all activity moves to NDBuys and SPO Online is decommissioned in March. Local government entities must now view state cooperative purchasing contracts in NDBuys at: www.omb.nd.gov/cooperativepurchasing.

Under North Dakota Century Code section 54-44.4-14, OMB may make the procurement information website available to government entities, including political subdivisions of the

state and public schools, for the purpose of issuance of solicitation notices that are in addition to any other notice requirements provided by law. This biennium, OMB is learning the system and determining how best to support local entities.

For more information about NDBuys, visit www.ndbuys.nd.gov. Contact the State Procurement Office at ndbuys@nd.gov for any questions.

Federal Emergency Management Agency Designates 19 Counties in North Dakota as Natural Disaster Areas

This Presidential disaster declaration allows the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) to extend much-needed emergency credit to producers recovering from natural disasters through emergency loans. Emergency loans can be used to meet various recovery needs including the replacement of essential items such as equipment or livestock, reorganization of a farming operation, or to refinance certain debts. FSA will review the loans based on the extent of losses, security available, and repayment ability.

Impacted Area: North Dakota, Minnesota, South Dakota

Triggering Disaster: Severe Storms, Tornadoes, and Straight-line Winds that occurred June 20, 2025, through June 21, 2025

Application Deadline: May 11, 2026.

Primary Counties Eligible:

North Dakota: Barnes, Burleigh,

FEMA

Cass, Eddy, Emmons, Foster, Grant, Griggs, Kidder, McLean, Morton, Oliver, Ransom, Sheridan, Sioux, Steele, Stutsman, Traill, Wells

Contiguous Counties Also Eligible:

- North Dakota: Adams, Benson, Dickey, Dunn, Grand Forks, Hettinger, LaMoure, Logan, McHenry, McIntosh, Mercer, Mountrail, Nelson, Pierce, Richland, Sargent, Stark, Ward
- South Dakota: Campbell, Corson
- Minnesota: Clay, Norman, Polk

FEMA offers different assistance programs for individual citizens, public groups including government agencies and private nonprofit organizations. To find the FEMA help you need following a disaster event, visit fema.gov/assistance.

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investing in *your future*,
or building *your dream business*,
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SIZED MOTOR GRADERS, AT [BUTLERMACHINERY.COM](https://www.butlermachinery.com)

Butler 

NDSU Extension Continues to Provide Support to Combat Spread of Bird Flu

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) continues to affect poultry and dairy operations across the region, keeping North Dakota poultry and livestock producers on high alert. NDSU Extension remains a frontline resource for producers and communities working to prevent the virus from spreading.

HPAI is an extremely contagious disease of poultry that has led to high mortality. Wild birds, the main carriers of HPAI, spread the disease to new areas during migration, creating an ongoing risk for North Dakota poultry owners.

North Dakota State University Extension's role in alleviating the spread of HPAI includes outreach, biosecurity education and response coordination.

"We've seen a consistent pattern of a wave, then a lull, over the last few years' migratory seasons," says Dr. Jake Galbreath, NDSU Extension veterinarian.

This year brought an unusual late-season wave with four cases in December and one in January. While migratory birds' winter travel may have moved out of the state, residential wildlife still carry HPAI in areas with year-round open water.

Dr. Galbreath has been busy with in-person education and outreach about preventing HPAI from disrupting

backyard flocks and commercial operations. NDSU Extension has held these free sessions across the state, stretching from Williston to Lamoure.

Attendees learn more about measures such as wearing personal protective equipment, and Dr. Galbreath provides more in-depth information about the virus.

Hunters and members of FFA and 4-H who exhibit at poultry events show up to hear how to enjoy their hobbies while being cautious. Dr. Galbreath relays information about the threat HPAI can pose to domestic pets as well.

The outreach project is in collaboration with North Dakota Health and Human Services and the Center for Immunization Research and Education, so the education emphasizes HPAI's impact on human health. HPAI is not currently being treated as a serious threat to humans, and there has been no human-to-human transmission, but biosecurity is still paramount to staying safe.

Miranda Meehan, NDSU Extension livestock environmental stewardship specialist, coordinates with local Extension agents to help surveil the area and make sure community members are aware of a positive case near them. Meehan also serves as the NDSU Extension disaster

education coordinator.

"The biggest thing we've learned through this whole experience is the importance of really strong relationships and lines of communication with our state partners, specifically the Department of Agriculture, the state vet's office and our emergency managers," says Meehan.

"Extension provides information to the North Dakotan, and we're the ones who ask, 'Where do you need us right now? What questions do you have?'" says Galbreath.

Four years into dealing with HPAI, Meehan says the disaster response team has built upon its response procedure, but the risk has persisted:

"We still need to have good biosecurity measures in place to protect our domestic flocks and other animals that can contract HPAI.

"The Extension agents are critical to that public education and building relationships, especially in commercial cases or cases that require flocks to be depopulated," says Meehan.

After an infected flock is depopulated, an important step in ridding a property of the virus is disposing of any infected material.

Mary Keena, NDSU Extension livestock environmental management specialist, helps with the disposal of

infected carcasses in commercial flocks.

"My job is making sure everyone knows and follows the protocol, and then we monitor to make sure the virus is eliminated on the operation," says Keena.

The process includes gathering infected material into a very hot compost pile.

Keena says the producers' task of eliminating and disposing of a high animal count can take an emotional toll.

"In North Dakota, these people raise these birds from when they're babies all the way until market. They are intimately involved in the operation," says Keena.

Keena has witnessed North Dakota producers' diligence firsthand, affirming that this deadly virus is not something they take lightly.

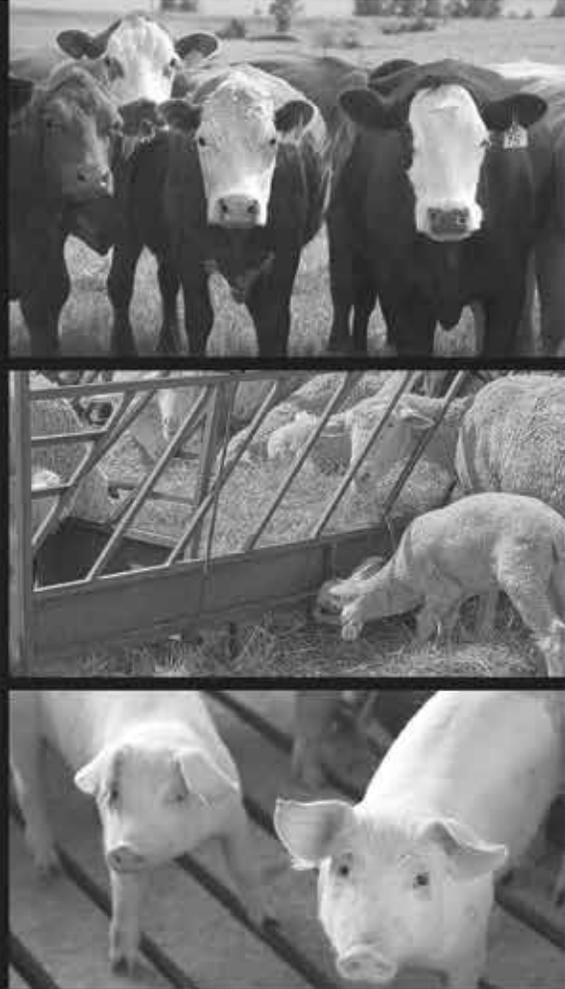
"The space and ability we have to raise animals in a biosecure environment is so, so good," says Keena. "Their biosecurity has been looked at. Their (safety) processes have been honed. The effort is there.

"And yet," says Keena, "we are not immune to geese flying over."

For more information: <https://www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/ag-hub/highly-pathogenic-avian-influenza>



North Dakota
Livestock Alliance
ndlivestock.org



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.

The **Cass** County Commission discussed the concept of a County Public Safety Task Force and directed staff to further develop a structure, potential goals, task force makeup and timeframes. The task force will include law enforcement and public safety representatives from agencies across Cass County. The citizens of Cass County are served by law enforcement and public safety professionals who are, simply put, the best at what they do. By-in-large, we have very safe communities. But increasingly there are perceptions, both in rural and urban areas, of increased risks and threats to public safety. This is demonstrated in comments made directly to Cass County officials and recent survey results designed to gauge public perceptions of safety and quality of life. The exact goals and outcomes of the task force will be developed by the members. Broadly, the intent will be to identify actions that can improve how law enforcement and public safety agencies in Cass County work together to improve public safety. Cass County is uniquely positioned to lead the effort.

– *Cass County News Release*

Burleigh County has launched a new webpage dedicated to sharing the progress of the historic Provident Building renovation. Located at the southwest corner of Rosser Avenue and 5th Street in Bismarck, the iconic 1954 structure was purchased by the County in 1995. The remodel began in August 2025 with projected completion in November 2027. The new project webpage features a detailed history of the building, including its recognizable 60-foot weather beacon. The County remains committed to preserving this downtown landmark while creating a functional space for citizens to conduct business. For more information and to view the latest progress photos, visit the Burleigh County website: www.burleigh.gov (click on "Remodel Updates") or go directly to www.burleigh.gov/countybuilding.

– *Burleigh County News Release*

Following a basement flood at the county courthouse earlier this week, **Grand Forks** County Commissioners briefly discussed at their meeting Tuesday the possibility of adding water sensors in the building's basement. In the discussion, commissioners suggested sensors to either detect rising water levels in the future, or to detect drops in water pressure throughout the rest of the building. The flood was caused by a burst watermain pipe resulting in an estimated four feet of water in the building's basement and the courthouse being closed on Monday. Tom Ford, county administrator, said the pipe that burst was in the former juvenile detention center. "It looks like it froze somewhere in the middle of the night and ruptured," he said. "Luckily all the water was contained to the basement of the courthouse, which was never restored after the flood of '97." The courthouse was reopened on Tuesday, and Ford said contractors will be coming in to make permanent repairs to the watermain pipes. The water in the basement was also pumped down into the storm drains below the courthouse as opposed to pumping it outside the building, to avoid an "ice rink" on the sidewalks. He added the courthouse doesn't usually have issues with freezing pipes, even in the older parts of the building where the infrastructure isn't insulated. "A little bit surprised, just because it didn't happen during the deep freeze we had, but it was unexpected for sure," he said.

– *Grand Forks Herald*

The **Stutsman** County Commission unanimously approved on Tuesday, Feb. 3, amendments to the county zoning ordinance for data centers, battery energy storage and carbon capture facilities. The ordinance requires data centers to be located at least 2 miles from any building or structure. New data centers will be required to be located at least 3 miles from any existing data center. A specific ordinance was not drafted for battery energy storage and carbon capture facilities, said Tyler Perleberg, Stutsman County director of tax equalization and zoning administrator. "Just like we have with several other uses in our ordinance, we can add them as a conditional use into certain zoning districts that we have," he said. "For example, we're looking at adding the battery energy

storage systems into our agricultural, commercial and industrial zones as a conditional use and for carbon capture the conditional use in our industrial district." Perleberg said allowing companies planning a battery energy storage or carbon capture facility to apply for a conditional use permit allows the Stutsman County Planning and Zoning Commission to place conditions on those projects on a case-by-case basis. The county commission would need to give final approval for the conditional use permit. Perleberg said the original draft of the ordinance for data centers had a 1-mile setback from any building or structure. He said a survey was sent to county residents residing within 2 miles of Applied Digital's data center located about 7 miles north of Jamestown, with respondents saying they deal with sound and light from the area of the data center. "I thought, you see in those responses, it was very, very appropriate to put into the ordinance a 2-mile setback for data centers just to kind of cover a little bit more protection for those residents that have to live around those things," he said, adding that some respondents

wanted the setback distance to be further. Perleberg said the data center ordinance also includes language for buffering and screening and security fencing around the facility.

– *Jamestown Sun*

After a decade of difficulty filling the elected position of State's Attorney, the **Grant** County Board of Commissioners is proposing to let voters decide whether the office should become an appointed position rather than an elected one. At their February 18 meeting, commissioners discussed placing a resolution on the June primary election ballot that would change the office of State's Attorney from elected to appointed. The proposal comes after years in which no candidates have filed to run for the position, leaving the county to rely on out-of-county appointments to fulfill its legal needs. Since 2016, Grant Walker has served as Grant County's State's Attorney by appointment. Walker, who resides outside the county, has continued in the role due to the absence of local candidates willing to seek election.

– *Grant County News*



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North Dakota Attorney General's Opinions

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

WHETHER THE WILLISTON BASIN SCHOOL DISTRICT #7'S RESPONSE FOR RECORDS COMPLIED

Opinion #: 2026-O-1

Date Issued: January 14, 2026

Issued To: Williston Basin School District #7

Request: Whether the Williston Basin School District #7's response to a request for records complied with N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 when some of the requested records are no longer available.

Nicole Johnson asked that Superintendent Dr. Richard Faidley of the Williston Basin School District #7 (District) provide her with the bid documents for the Innovation Academy renovation project completed in or around 2018. Because the project was completed by the former Williston Public School District #1 prior to its reorganization into District #7 in 2020, some of the bid records from that period were no longer available in the District's current files due to prior administrative actions. In light of these circumstances, District staff corresponded extensively with Ms. Johnson, providing her with board minutes, lease and construction agreements, and other relevant documents. Under the open records law, a public entity is obligated only to provide records in its possession and is not required to create or compile records that do not exist.

Conclusion: The Williston Basin School District #7's response complied with N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 because it provided all responsive records in its possession.

WHETHER THE RANSOM COUNTY COMMISSION VIOLATED CODE BY REQUIRING A REQUESTER TO SIGN FOR RECORDS

Opinion #: 2026-O-03

Date Issued: January 27, 2026

Issued To: Ransom County Commission

Request: Whether the Ransom County Commission violated N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by requiring a requester to sign a document for receipt of records in response to an open records request.

Analysis: The Commission is the governing body of a public entity and is subject to the open records law. "Except as otherwise specifically provided by law, all records of a public entity are public records, open and accessible for inspection during reasonable office

hours." Once requested, a public entity "shall furnish the requester one copy of the public records requested." The initial request "need not be made in person or in writing," however, the "public entity may require written clarification of the request to determine what records are being requested." "A public entity may charge up to twenty-five cents per impression of a paper copy." "A record may not be denied unless a law provides that it is either exempt from the open records law or confidential." Collecting information not required by law before disclosing an open record "may be a deterrent to someone who requests access to public records."

Conclusion: The Ransom County Commission violated N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by requiring a requester to sign an acknowledgment as a condition of receiving records in response to an open records request.

WHETHER THE WILLISTON BASIN SCHOOL DISTRICT #7 COMPLIED WHEN IT PROVIDED REDACTED RECORDS

Opinion #: 2026-O-2

Date Issued: January 21, 2026

Issued To: Williston Basin School District #7

Request: Whether the Williston Basin School District No. 7 substantially complied with N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 when it provided partially redacted records in response to an open records request, verbally informed the requester of the legal authority for the redactions, and later provided written references to the legal authority for the redactions.

Analysis: Tom Simon requested all records related to a teacher, the teacher's alleged inappropriate relationship with a student, and two paraprofessionals who were terminated by the District.

1. The District's Human Resources Director "informed Mr. Simon that she could not immediately 'on the spot' provide him with those records due to ... confidentiality issues and the significant number of pending open records requests that had come in before his," though the District ultimately provided the requested records the next day. Mr. Simon picked up the records in person and discovered they contained redactions related to the alleged incident involving the teacher and the student. Mr. Simon then "immediately called" the District's superintendent and spoke with him about the redactions. During the phone call,

the superintendent "was very clear with Mr. Simon that he could not release any records or information protected under FERPA A5 and the pending Title IX investigation. Any information that could reveal the identity of the student and/or compromise or release information from an ongoing Title IX investigation had to be redacted."

Conclusion: The Williston Basin School District No. 7 substantially complied with N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by providing the requester with the legal authority for the redactions verbally on the day he picked up the records.

WHETHER MORTON COUNTY'S RESPONSE TO A REQUEST FOR RECORDS COMPLIED WITH LAW. A NEW ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OPEN RECORDS OPINION HAS BEEN ISSUED:

Opinion #: 2026-O-06

Date Issued: February 27, 2026

Issued To: Morton County

Request: Whether Morton County's response to a request for records complied with N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18.

Analysis: "Except as otherwise specifically provided by law, all records of a public entity are public records, open and accessible for inspection during reasonable office hours."⁴ Under the open records law, a public entity is required to provide access only to records in its possession or custody. A public entity is not required to create records, compile information that does not already exist, or obtain records not in its possession. Each office, department, or agency within a political subdivision is responsible only for the records in its possession and has no obligation to locate or provide records held by another agency, even if both are part of the same political subdivision. When a public entity does not have the requested records, it must, within a reasonable time, inform the requester that the records are not in its possession or do not exist.

Conclusion: Morton County complied with the open records law when the Auditor, within a reasonable time, informed the requester that the records were not in the County's possession. The County was not required to obtain or provide records maintained by Morton County Housing Authority, a separate public entity.

WHETHER THE MANDAN CITY COMMISSION HELD A MEETING WITHOUT PROVIDING PROPER NOTICE.

Opinion #: 2026-O-05

Date Issued: February 27, 2026

Issued To: Mandan City Commission

Request: Whether the Mandan City Commission held a meeting without providing proper notice in violation of N.D.C.C. § 44-04-20 when a quorum of the Commission did not attend. Residents of the City of Mandan requested to meet with city leaders about the possible use of property as "a recovery house for individuals recovering from substance abuse and addiction." Members of the Mandan City Commission (Commission) were invited to the meeting by the residents, which was scheduled for September 1, 2023. Because there was a chance that a quorum of the Commission would be present at the meeting with residents, the Commission provided notice of the meeting on August 30, 2023, by posting the notice to the City of Mandan website, emailing the notice to persons who have asked to receive meeting notices, filing the notice with the City Auditor's office, and publicly posting it in the Mandan City Hall where the meeting was held. Only two of the five Commissioners attended the meeting. Karen Jordan timely requested an opinion from this office, alleging that the Commission failed to provide adequate notice of the meeting.

Analysis: A quorum is defined as "one-half or more of the members of the governing body, or any smaller number if sufficient for a governing body to transact business on behalf of the public entity." When an opinion is requested on a potential open meeting violation, "the attorney general shall base the opinion on the facts given by the public entity." In this case, only two members of the five-member Commission attended the meeting with residents on September 1, 2023. Two members of the Commission are insufficient to act on behalf of the Commission, and there is no indication that those members discussed the meeting with other members of the Commission. Therefore, there was no meeting of the Commission on September 1, 2023, as defined in statute.

Conclusion: The Mandan City Commission was not required to provide notice because a quorum of the Commission did not attend.

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Shifting Expectations:

Don't Let Short-Term Challenges Derail Your Retirement Plans

If you want to have the retirement you envision, you need to start planning for it now. A financial professional can assist you in creating a strategy to help achieve your long-term goals.

From Nationwide Learning Resources www.nationwide.com/lc/resources:

The notion of a “traditional” retirement is rapidly evolving. For many Americans (61%), the retirement planning playbook of previous generations no longer applies. According to a recent Advisor Authority survey, powered by Nationwide Retirement Institute®, three in five investors say their retirement expectations have changed significantly over the past five years.

Among pre-retirees aged 55-65, that number climbs even higher (65%). In light of these shifting expectations, it's more important than ever to consider working with a financial professional to help ensure your retirement strategy stays on track.



Why are retirement expectations shifting?

Several factors are reshaping how many Americans think about retirement. Persistent inflation and rising costs mean a loss of purchasing power, both today and in the future. Health care expenses continue to soar and increasing life expectancies mean retirement savings need to last longer.

Add in economic uncertainty, stock market volatility, and changing work patterns (i.e., remote/hybrid and increased use of AI-driven tools), and it is clear why many people are rethinking their retirement goals.

A financial professional can help you navigate these and other challenges that come up along the way and adjust your strategy accordingly as your life changes.

The planning gap

Despite shifting expectations, most Americans aren't being proactive about retirement planning. We found that more than two-thirds (67%) of investors spend zero percent of their time planning for retirement in a typical month. Even among pre-retirees aged 55-65, who are closest to retirement, more than half (53%) aren't dedicating any time in a typical month to retirement planning.

This lack of planning has the potential to create a significant disconnect between retirement expectations and reality. But you can help make your dream a reality with proper planning.

What's more, the decisions you make today can significantly impact your financial future – that's why it's so important to put a solid retirement plan

in place sooner than later. Partnering with a financial professional can help you make smart financial decisions for today and tomorrow.

How financial professionals can help support retirement readines

Our survey uncovered several key areas where financial professionals are using their expertise to help hardworking people like you prepare for retirement:

Tax planning

Financial professionals are helping their clients with tax-planning strategies to help preserve more of their retirement savings and create more efficient retirement income strategies.

Health care planning

Health care costs remain a top concern, with financial professionals providing guidance on retirement health care and Medicare solutions. A financial professional can help you understand and plan for potential long-term needs so you can be prepared to manage your health care costs in retirement.

Income generation

Helping clients convert their retirement savings to income is a priority for many financial professionals. This may include things like helping you diversify your retirement portfolio to take advantage of investment growth potential while incorporating solutions such as annuity products to create reliable income streams.

Social Security optimization

Other financial professionals are helping clients with strategies for claiming Social Security benefits. The timing of when you claim Social Security can significantly impact your retirement income. Having a financial professional in your corner can help you better understand your benefits by giving you the tools and guidance to make informed decisions.

Long-term care planning

It's important to consider long-term care options. Long-term care expenses can put a wrench in the best-laid of retirement plans, so it's important to have strategies in place to help manage these costs should they arise. A financial professional can help you review options that support your needs and budget, ensuring that unexpected costs won't derail your retirement goals.

Taking action: The value of professional guidance

If you aren't actively planning for retirement, now is the time to consider partnering with a financial professional, who can help you to:

- Assess your current retirement goals and stay focused on the long term despite short-term challenges

- Navigate market volatility with appropriate diversification strategies
- Understand how inflation might impact your long-term plans
- Evaluate your long-term care insurance and retirement health care needs
- Adjust your retirement income strategies as needed

Remember, retirement planning isn't a one-time event. Your personal circumstances, goals, and external factors, such as market and economic conditions, can change throughout your life. Checking in regularly with a financial professional and adjusting your plan as needed can help ensure you stay on track amidst evolving expectations.

Don't let these shifting expectations impact your retirement plans. Partner with a financial professional to create and maintain a retirement strategy that can adapt as needed. The financial professional you choose to work with can guide you with an objective perspective as you work toward your retirement goals.

Sources and Disclaimers can be found at <https://www.nationwide.com/lc/resources/investing-and-retirement/articles/shifting-expectations-dont-let-short-term-challenges-derail-your-retirement-plans>



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Start Planning National County Government Month Activities

National County Government Month (NCGM), held each April, is an annual celebration of county government.

To help counties plan for this year's celebrations, NACo has released an updated toolkit, featuring outreach strategies and local activity ideas.

Ways to Celebrate

The toolkit at www.naco.org/page/national-county-government-month#toolkit features ideas to help your county celebrate, including:

County Workforce Engagement

National County Government Month is an excellent opportunity to recognize the hard work and dedication of county employees. This April, consider planning events and using social media to show gratitude to county employees for all that they do.

Outreach Tools

Find a range of tools, including media strategies and suggested social media post

Involve Schools

Include schools in your National County Government month activities to enable students to learn about county government.

Examples from Past Years

- Goodhue County, Minn. ran an essay contest for students in grades 8-12 with the prompt: "How has



county government impacted your community for the better?"

- Hamilton County, Ohio welcomed high school government students to meet with county commissioners and learn about how counties serve residents every day
 - Upshur County, West Virginia commissioners visited a local middle school to connect with students and speak about county government
 - Over 200 7th grade students in Benton County, Wash. made parade floats for different counties in the state
 - Counties Work Online Game and My County Works Activity Book - NACo, together with iCivics, has created a full curriculum to educate students, grades 6 through 12, about the important role and functions of county government.
- This year, we're aiming for 150,000 plays of Counties Work during the month of April!

Choosing the Right Attachments

Continued from page 10

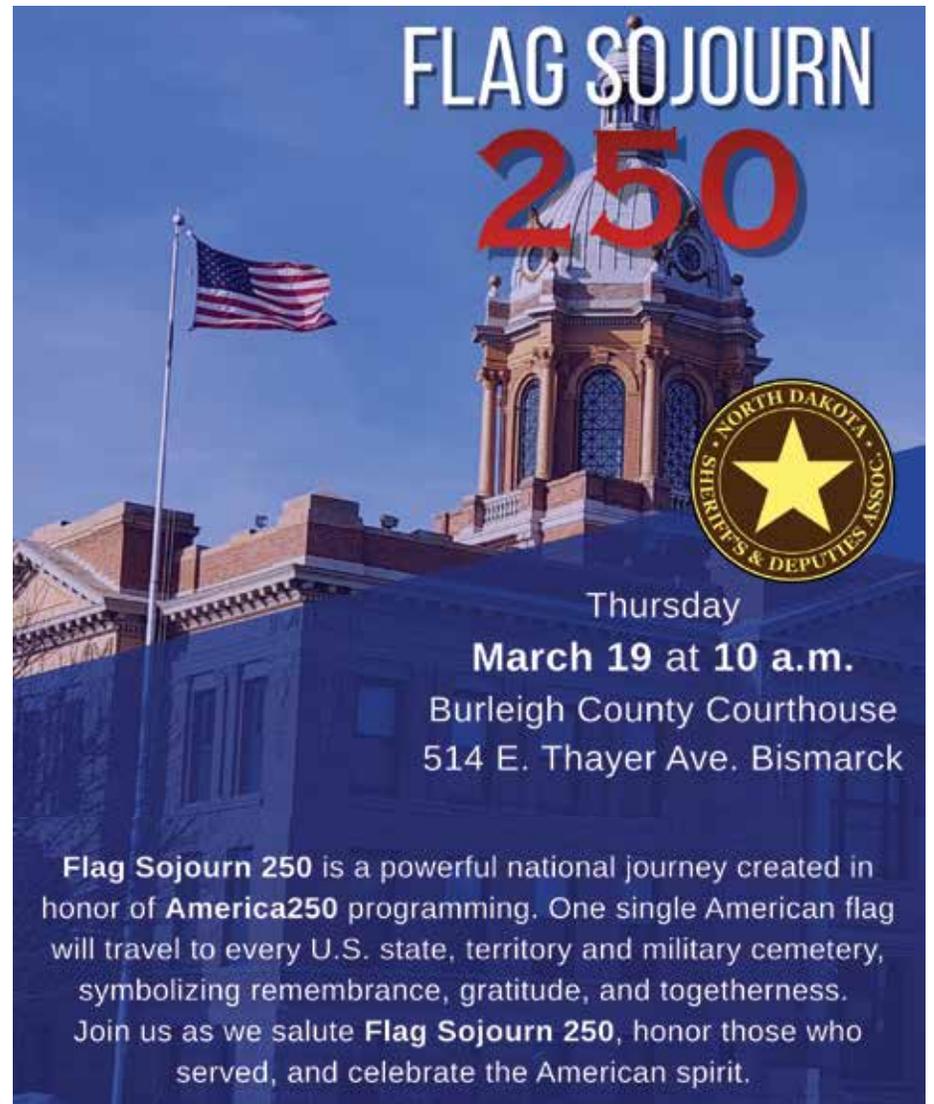
spot and keep the work area cleaner and safer," added Nelson.

- **DM360™:** Pairing Diamond's attachment technology with a field-tested carrier platform, the DM360 offers enhanced visibility, a 360° rotating cab, three steering modes, and outstanding maneuverability for roadside and utility right-of-way work. This dedicated carrier pairs seamlessly with several Diamond attachments, replacing multiple pieces of equipment with a single unit. Exceptional stability and operator comfort also make it ideal for crews tackling long corridors or high-traffic environments.
- **Boom Drum Mulcher:** Designed for use in hard-to-reach roadside areas, a boom drum mulcher delivers one-pass cutting, processing, and cleanup that can outperform skid steers and excavators. Diamond's

model features an unobtrusive design that enhances visibility, while a high-capacity hydraulic motor, optimized infeed, and optional bolt-on door provide controlled, contained mulching.

- **Drum Mulcher:** Diamond's next-generation drum mulcher is built from direct contractor input and designed to help reduce operating costs over time when paired with advanced tooth technology. Available in open drum (OD) and depth control (DC) configurations, it maintains stability on uneven shoulders and ditch lines and quickly processes material up to 9" in diameter.

3. **Ditch and Drainage Maintenance:** Proper drainage is essential for preventing roadbed failure and erosion. Over time, sediment and debris can block culverts and fill ditches, creating standing water that weakens infrastructure.



North Dakota will receive a U.S. flag to fly for two days March 18th and 19th as it travels across the country as part of the America250 celebration. A formal raising of the flag will take place at the Burleigh County Courthouse at 10 a.m. CT Thursday, March 19. The Flag Sojourn 250 is more than a journey — it is a solemn Sojourn. The Flag Sojourn 250 honors our nation's most prized symbol and pays tribute to all of our countrymen and women, including those who have given their lives in service to the ideals The Flag represents. With the help of the National Sheriff's Association, this special flag will be carried with reverence on a domestic passage across our country ending its journey in Washington, D.C. in July 2026.

- **Boom Ditcher:** A boom ditcher clears ditch lines and culverts to help crews restore water movement quickly, reducing flood risk and protecting road surfaces.
- **Gravel Reclaimer:** Ideal for removing berms, restoring shoulders, and reclaiming gravel to improve runoff and enhance safety, a gravel reclaimer uses its disc-style blades to contour road edges, smooth transitions from road to ditch, and eliminate clumps and buildup that contribute to drainage issues.

Choosing the Right Boom Attachment

Selecting the right boom attachment depends on the type of vegetation and terrain being worked on, as well as the desired finish. Each one is engineered to keep operators safe and productive while delivering clean, consistent roadside results. In general:

- **Flail mowers** produce a fine finish, throw little debris, and are ideal for removing grass and light brush near heavy-traffic areas.
- **Rotary mowers** feature high torque speeds to power through dense brush and small trees, making them perfect for wide shoulders and slopes.
- **Drum mulchers** offer maximum power for heavy brush and tree removal with controlled mulch output.

"Every cut, pass, and roadside mile depends on the right attachment doing its job," added Nelson. "By matching equipment to vegetation, terrain, and safety needs, crews can work more efficiently, improve visibility, protect drainage, and reduce risk without overextending operators or their machines."

For more information, visit www.diamondmowers.com.

Shirley Dockter Retires After 65 Years at McIntosh County Courthouse

Paula Patterson | Wishek Star *Reprinted with permission.*

After an extraordinary 65-year career at the McIntosh County Courthouse, Shirley Dockter is being celebrated for a lifetime of dedication, resilience and public service that has shaped both county government and the community it serves.

Dockter began her career in August 1960 in the County Superintendent of Schools Office. In 1974, she moved to the Social Services office, where she has served as an eligibility worker for the past five decades.

In the early years of the Food Stamp Program, Dockter and her colleagues delivered physical stamps to qualifying applicants in Zeeland, Ashley and Wishek. “If there was a blizzard, they still went,” she recalled, noting the team’s commitment to ensuring families received assistance. Once the program shifted to mailing stamps, the long drives ended; today, electronic EBT cards have streamlined the process even further.

More recently, Social Services realigned statewide, allowing staff to assist applicants within a broader service zone rather than only within county lines. Dockter has

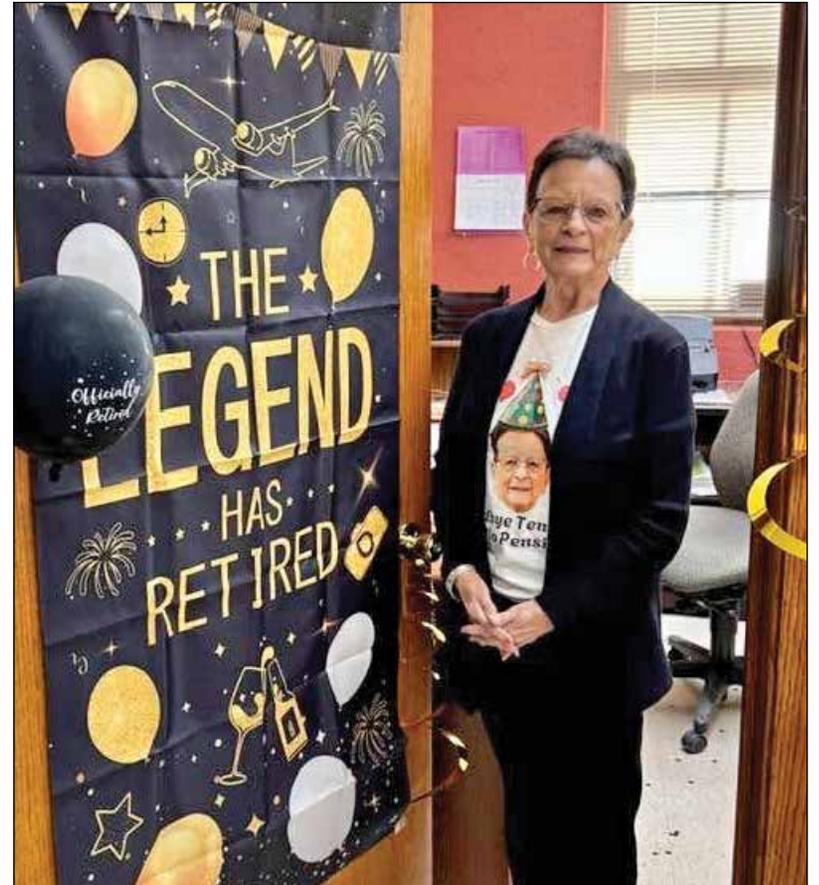
navigated decades of evolving rules, regulations and technology – changes she embraced throughout her long tenure.

When asked about her favorite part of the job, Dockter didn’t hesitate: “Working with my co-workers.” Colleagues say that sentiment reflects her daily presence. Fun shirts and decorations filled her retirement celebration, a nod to the energy and humor she brought to the office.

Fellow staff members and county officials often describe Dockter as the heart of the courthouse. Her reliability, warmth and steady professionalism set a standard for public service in McIntosh County. Many credit her with fostering a positive work environment and inspiring others to go above and beyond.

As Dockter steps away from her official duties, her influence will continue to be felt by the courthouse and the community she served. Her career stands as a reminder of the profound impact one individual can make through a lifetime of service.

After 65 years with McIntosh County, Shirley Dockter leaves behind a legacy of excellence, kindness and civic pride – one that will be remembered for generations.



Shirley Dockter

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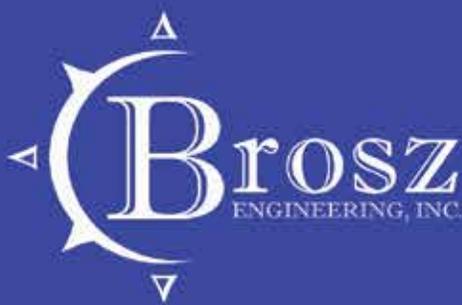
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2026 COUNTY CALENDAR

March

- 10-11 _____ ND Transportation Conference, Bismarck Event Center
- 17 ___ Tax Reform and Relief Advisory Committee, Roughrider Room, Capitol
- 18 _____ Budget Section, Senate Chamber, Capitol
- 19 _____ Government Finance Committee, Roughrider Room, Capitol
- 26 _____ Water Topics Overview Committee, Roughrider Room, Capitol
- 26 _____ Information Technology Committee, Harvest Room, Capitol
- 28-29 ___ NDGOP State Convention, North Dakota State Fairgrounds, Minot
- 31 _____ Agriculture and Water Management Committee, Roughrider Room, Capitol

April

- 1-30 _____ National County Government Month
- 1 _____ Judiciary Committee, Roughrider Room, Capitol
- 3 _____ Good Friday (State Holiday)
- 6-12 _____ National Public Health Week
- 14-15 _____ County Tour to Cass, Grand Forks, Steele and Traill Counties
- 22-23 ___ HR Collaborative Conference, Bismarck Hotel & Conference Center
- 29 _____ NDCCA Board Meeting, NDACo County Office Building
- 30 _____ NDACo Board Meeting, NDACo County Office Building

May

- 5-8 _____ Western Interstate Region (WIR) Conference, Maui, HI
- 7 _____ NDIRF Annual Meeting, ND Heritage Center
- 10 _____ Mother's Day
- 13-14 _____ ND Clerks of Court Association Annual Meeting, Coteau Room, Capitol
- 14-15 _____ ND Sheriffs & Deputies Association Meeting, Burleigh Morton Detention Center, Bismarck



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