

Countyfest 2024 is Taking Shape

Jeff Eslinger | County News Editor

In less than two months, October 20-22, hundreds of county officials will gather at the Bismarck Event Center for the NDACo Annual Conference. Sign up before September 27 for “early bird” pricing!

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.

Here’s a sneak preview of the workshop topics:

- Grants for Roads
- PIO / Spokesperson for Your County
- Zoning
- Human Trafficking
- A.I.
- Behavioral Health
- Retirement: PERS & Nationwide
- Election Security
- Property Tax Measure
- Drone Safety
- Public Safety Communications

Be sure to check www.ndaco.org/conference for updates on titles, times and dates!

Our featured keynote speaker is Christopher Carter, an expert presenter known for delivering hard-hitting content with energy and humor. Christopher will also amaze and entertain us Monday evening after



Christopher Carter

dinner. With any luck, we’ll also squeeze in a few rounds of trivia.

ATTENTION FIRST-TIME ATTENDEES:

We will offer a webinar before the conference to give you the low-down on what to expect. Experienced attendees will

be welcome to take it in, too. Watch for details in your email inbox.

Reminder of major change: ALL activities will be held at the Bismarck Event Center, including the Welcoming Social on Sunday evening. Registrants will be receiving more details and reminder via email

This year’s theme “Countyfest” celebrates counties in the tradition of Oktoberfest celebrating harvest. So, dust off your lederhosen, put a feather in your Alpine hat, and join your fellow county officials to exchange ideas, learn and celebrate our accomplishments.

A list of hotels honoring the state rate is posted on our website.

So don’t wait! Register for the Annual Conference now! Details about everything in this article can be found at www.ndaco.org/conference.



The Integrity of North Dakota Elections

Counties are a vital partner in North Dakota election administration. The county auditor ensures that election laws are upheld and that elections are conducted securely, accurately, and with integrity. The North Dakota Office of the Secretary of State is providing election information to the readers of County News to spread the truth about our election processes and provide insight into the integrity of our election systems. This issue will feature



how people can support North Dakota elections.

SEEK TRUSTED SOURCES FOR ELECTION INFORMATION

You can help support the security and integrity of North Dakota elections by seeking trusted sources for election information and encouraging others to do the same. The North Dakota Office of the Secretary of State and county election officials are your trusted sources for election information. Here is a brief overview of the trusted election information shared in past issues of County News. To learn more, visit vote.nd.gov, email soselect@nd.gov, or call 701-328-4146.

Voter ID Law means one person = one vote. North Dakota’s Voter ID Law requires a valid form of ID to vote – ND driver’s license, ND non-driver ID, long-term care certificate, tribal ID, or tribal letter. The ID must have a North Dakota address and show the voter is at least 18 years old. IDs issued to non-U.S. citizens have specific identifiers, and North Dakota’s Central Voter File flags anyone who is a non-citizen, which ensures election officials only allow U.S. citizens to vote.

When a voter checks in at a polling

location or votes absentee, election workers verify their ID information against the Central Voter File. The Central Voter File is immediately updated upon voter check-in, and all other polling locations in North Dakota are updated to reflect that the voter has cast a ballot. This prevents someone from voting more than once in an election.

North Dakota voters are never mailed a ballot without first requesting one. A voter must fill out an absentee ballot application if they wish to vote absentee. On the application, voters can request to receive an absentee ballot for all the elections in the calendar year. If they choose this option, voters who applied for a ballot in early 2024 will start receiving their General Election absentee ballot at the beginning of October.

Absentee applications are checked against the Central Voter File to ensure the person is a qualified voter before a ballot is mailed. When an absentee ballot is returned, the voter’s signature and ID information are validated against the signature on the absentee ballot application. The Central Voter File is then updated to indicate that the voter has voted, which prevents the voter from voting more than once in an election.

North Dakota only uses paper ballots. Ballot tabulators are not

Continued on page 9

General Election

Important Dates for Voters

Make a Plan to Vote!

Go to vote.nd.gov/myvotinginfo to request an absentee ballot, view polling location information, and see a sample ballot.

NOW

Voters can submit an absentee ballot application

SEPT 16

Vote by mail counties mail out applications to voters

SEPT 26

Ballots mailed to voters who submitted an application

NOV 4

Deadline to return absentee or vote by mail ballots

NOV 5

Election Day

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Board Member PROFILE



ROBERT WILSON
Cass County Administer
ND’s representative on the NACo Board
of Directors

What is your favorite thing about your job? I love the variety of it – no two days are the same or even hours. I work with commissioners, employees, and the public, and I enjoy it all. Serving on the National Board has also been very rewarding. I’m very impressed and appreciative of local government and all we do for the public. It’s very rewarding.

Family: Wife Emily and daughter Annalise (12) who just started school. Most days we are traveling to a practice or a game – soccer, basketball, volleyball, the works.

Other involvements: Soccer club board, church board and of course the National Association of County Administrators.

Currently Reading: A biography of Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter.

What is on your current playlist: Everything from Janis Joplin to Willie Nelson to Tupac.

Favorite Movie: Rudy. I’ve watched it a dozen times and it still brings me to tears.

Something nobody knows about you: I was once a TV reporter and interviewed a Pearl Harbor survivor on the USS Arizona memorial. I also interviewed Barack Obama in a janitor’s closet in a high school gym in Iowa during the caucuses.



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NRG Technology Services Staff:
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FROM the COUNTIES

Time Flies When You're Having Fun!

Wow, this last year has flown by! This is the last time I am able to address you as the President. My time has gone quickly, but I have thoroughly enjoyed this last year with all of you. It has been great to meet you all through the County Tours and at the different meetings throughout the year.

I have a few different things to talk about in my last opportunity to address you. First, please get involved with NDACo, whether it's participating in ILG training, attending the annual conference, your member association meetings, or joining the board, please get involved. You will increase your knowledge and benefit yourself, your county, our organization, and our great state! I have never been part of an organization with this caliber of staff and members; we are awesome!

The NDACo Annual Conference is slated for October 20-22. I know this is a busy time for everyone, but I encourage you to attend the conference. The staff at NDACo never fails to put on a great conference with great topics. My favorite part of the conference is the networking that it enables.

We have been on County Tours this summer and it has been great! We learn ways to better serve you at every stop that we make. Whether we hear about successes, needs, or complaints, it helps



Jayme Tenneson | NDACo President
Nelson/Griggs County State's Attorney

the leadership to understand the needs of YOU, the members, and allows NDACo to serve you better. Thank you to those who have taken time from your busy schedules to meet with us, and I encourage the rest of you to visit us when we are in your counties.

Next, we have an important election coming up in November. This election will most definitely impact the way local subdivisions are funded regardless of the results of the election. Whatever your position, educate yourself and those around you.

Thank you all for the opportunity this past year. I hope to see everyone at the conference in October!

FROM the COMMISSIONERS

Change is Inevitable!

Data centers and crypto mining facilities are hot topics across the state. Citizens are expressing their concerns on this controversial subject. I am encouraging county commissioners and zoning officials to educate themselves on these types of facilities in order to make informed decisions at the local level. The industry is rapidly expanding and we need to be prepared by having policies in place that responsibly allow for technological advancement. Recently I took the opportunity to listen to the ND Public Service Commissioner Data Center Technical Conference pertaining to large load power impacts. If you get a chance, I recommend listening to this worthwhile recording of August 1st; it is available on the NDPSC's website at <https://psc.nd.gov/public/meetings/schedules.php>. Thank you, Aaron Birst, for being a group participant at this NDPSC conference!

Not only does the AI world have my head spinning, so does the proposed constitutional measure pertaining to property tax elimination. Aside from all the ramifications this measure could cause for local subdivisions and state government, I can't understand why I as a voter would want to spend our state tax dollars to benefit large for-profit corporations, many of which



Joan Hollekim | NDCCA President
Mountrail County Commissioner

have corporate headquarters located out of state. To give a good example for the 2023 tax year, Mountrail County's top two taxpayers paid a little over \$2.7 million in total taxes, the top ten paid over \$7.1 million, the top 20 paid over \$9.8 million and the top 30 paid over \$11.1 million. These top 30 corporations represent a very small fraction of the total taxpayers, but these same 30 companies pay over 50% of the total taxes levied for all taxing districts in Mountrail County. This is only one county in North Dakota; imagine the amount of our state tax dollars that will be spent to give property tax relief to large for-profit corporations if this measure passes. I believe the legislators were on the right track implementing a \$500 residential tax credit for ND property taxpayers. Imagine if the millions of dollars in property taxes paid by large for-profit corporations could be used to lessen the property tax burden for North Dakota residents. Please continue to stay informed and educate your voters on this proposed measure.

Enjoy the rest of your summer and don't forget to register for the October conference! Every year the NDACo Team is dedicated to providing us with an eventful conference. Let's show our appreciation through our participation.

FROM the ASSOCIATION

Time to Reflect

As a lot of you are dropping kids (or grandkids) off at school the last couple of weeks, it is a gentle reminder that time stands still for no one. Those hot summer days are beginning to turn into cooler fall nights with a tad less sunlight.

While some of us dread this transition, I look at it as a time to reflect back on another summer with my boys around (I'm now officially an empty nester) along with making a bunch of new memories with friends and family.

Honestly, I am still a bit sore from Linda's son's wedding dance. Which brings me to the point of this column: I read somewhere that every good business should always take time to reflect where they have been so they can figure out where they can go next. And that is why we at NDACo are constantly evaluating our programs to ensure we provide value to all of you.

While we can never make your jobs easy (as no county job is easy) we do



Aaron Birst | NDACo Executive Director

strive to make your jobs better and hopefully more enjoyable! So take a few minutes to look over our Annual Report in the center of this issue, and make sure if you haven't already done so, to sign up for Countyfest, our "Octoberfest" conference that we are busy getting ready for you.

Prøst everyone!



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Understanding USERRA and How to Support Service Member Employees

Joanna Drennen | HR Collaborative for Local Government Executive Director

The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) passed in 1994 “protects military service members and veterans from employment discrimination on the basis of their service, and allows them to regain their civilian jobs following a period of uniformed service”¹.

Your local government entity has a responsibility to support and accommodate active service member employees by providing benefits that demonstrate appreciation for their service and facilitate a smooth transition between military duties and their employment.

“USERRA applies to members of the Armed Forces, Reserves, National Guard, and other ‘Uniformed Services’ (including the National Disaster Medical System and the Commissioned Corps of the Public Health Service). The law ensures that service members:

1. Are not disadvantaged in their civilian careers because of their military service;
2. Are promptly re-employed in their civilian jobs upon return from duty;



Joanna Drennen

3. Are not discriminated against by employers because of past, present, or future military service”²

Regarding health coverage, the law states service members must be offered continuation of their elected employer-sponsored health plan during deployments. The continuation extends

to their individual coverage as well as qualifying dependents.

Deployed service members’ continued health coverage may be “for up to 24 months; however, they may be required to pay up to 102 percent of the full premium. For military service of less than 31 days, health care coverage is provided as if the service member had remained employed”³ and, if they choose not to continue coverage, they may be reinstated in their health coverage plan upon reemployment, “generally without any waiting periods or exclusions (e.g., pre-existing condition exclusions) except for service-connected illnesses or injuries”⁴.

USERRA also guarantees that upon completion of military service, employees have the right to return to their previous job position or an equivalent one with the same pay, benefits, and seniority. If a service member is “unqualified for the reemployment position to which they are returning, USERRA requires that an employer make reasonable efforts (such as training or retraining at no expense to the service member) to enable the returning service member to refresh or upgrade their skills and perform the essential tasks of the position”⁵.

Acknowledging the sacrifices and contributions of military employees

through appreciation events, awards, or simple gestures of gratitude fosters a supportive workplace culture.

By providing these essential benefits and others required by USERRA, your entity will fulfill its legal obligations and demonstrate its commitment to supporting active military employees throughout their service and beyond.

For more information, check out the U.S. Department of Labor’s USERRA Fact Sheet here: <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/VETS/files/USERRA-Fact-Sheet-2-FAQs.pdf>.

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NDIRF Board of Directors Names Pic CEO

The North Dakota Insurance Reserve Fund (NDIRF) Board of Directors is proud to announce Director of Claims Keith Pic has been named CEO of the local government coverage provider.

Pic begins his new role on July 16, 2024, in which he is responsible for working with the organization’s management team to uphold the NDIRF’s mission to be the source of risk services for North Dakota political subdivisions and fulfill the organization’s strategic plan goals.

“I’m grateful to have the opportunity to lead the NDIRE,” Pic said. “By building strong relationships with local agents, members, member associations, and other partners for the past 38 years, the NDIRF’s Board of Directors and employees have built an incredible organization to provide risk services to North Dakota political subdivisions. I look forward to continuing those relationships and serving the NDIRF’s membership.”

Pic has a bachelor’s degree from North Dakota State University (Fargo, ND) and a master’s degree in risk management and insurance from Florida State University – College of Business (Tallahassee, FL). He has obtained the CPCU, CIC, AIC-M, AINS, and SCLA insurance designations.



Keith Pic

Pic first joined the NDIRF in June 2012 as an Outside Claims Adjuster. In January 2018, he was promoted to Assistant Director of Claims, supervising the organization’s multi-line claims department. He was promoted in October 2021 to Director of Claims, overseeing all operations within the claims department.

Pic served 14 years in the Army National Guard. His military career included deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan as well as state activations for various flood response efforts, COVID-19 support, and a humanitarian mission to Haiti.

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Body Language for Leadership

Christopher Carter | Keynote Speaker for 2024 NDACo Annual Conference

It's no secret that strong interpersonal skills can give a leader a decisive advantage. Among the most important of these skills are the abilities to both understand and use body language.

When it comes to using body language leadership, there are three crucial steps. First, we must choose to be fully present and to pay attention to those we serve. This is often difficult, because we're so focused on our own agenda that we forget the fundamental importance of just listening and taking in what others are saying, both through their words and their body language.

Second, we must become aware of the meaning behind nonverbal signals that people are sending us.

While there are many possible body language cues to take in, I recommend and teach focusing on what I call The Big Four. These are Proximity, Orientation, Pacifiers, and Open Body language. To help remember these, I use the acronym, POPO.

PROXIMITY:

Proximity has to do with whether people move closer to us or farther away while we are communicating. We all have a natural tendency to move closer to people when they activate the reward center of our brain. When you're talking with a colleague or a constituent and they suddenly move closer or lean into you, it's very likely that you are talking about something they like or find strong value in. Likewise, if they shift or move away, there's a strong likelihood that you've just said something they disagree with or perceive negatively.

Understand that it's the direction of the movement that counts more than the degree. So become aware of sudden changes in the person's proximity to you.

ORIENTATION:

Orientation has to do with how a person's head, torso, and feet align. Humans are very good at faking paying attention. We can look directly in a person's

eyes and act like we're really listening. But we're terrible at lying with the rest of the body. Often a person's torso or feet will point in the direction of what they're really paying attention to. When your conversation partner is looking towards you, but has their torso or feet aligned in a different direction, it's likely that they've grown impatient with the discussion and are thinking about going elsewhere.

PACIFIERS:

Pacifiers are the physical movements we use to calm ourselves when our emotional energy starts to elevate. These include things like adjusting collars or cuffs, drumming fingers on the table, curling hair with our fingers, bouncing a foot up and down, and many others. When a person suddenly starts to use pacifiers, they've become uncomfortable or anxious. You won't necessarily be aware of the source of the anxiety. But seeing these pacifiers is a signal to you that you should begin asking questions to uncover the cause.



Christopher Carter

OPEN BODY LANGUAGE:

Open body language signals confidence and trust. It's a common myth that if a person's arms are crossed, they must be resistant to what we're saying. Simply having arms crossed is usually just a comfortable position. But when people start to feel uncomfortable, they often engage in body blocking behaviors. Be on the lookout for clusters of these. Both arms and feet crossed, for example. Multiple

forms of closed body language can signal resistance or even hostility to our message.

The third step is to be aware of what our body language says to others. Each of the four body language signals mentioned above can convey to others both our level of confidence and our level of engagement with them. If we keep our body language open and avoid using pacifiers, we will look like we truly understand our jobs and believe in our message. If we lean in a little when the individual we are conversing with is talking about the issues that matter to them, and if we keep our head and torso aligned toward them when we communicate, we signal that they have our undivided attention. And that goes a long way towards building trust.

There is an old saying that people buy from those they know, like, and trust. In any position of leadership, it is crucial that the people you communicate with buy YOU. Body language is an important and often overlooked component of creating both trust and connection.

September 2024 High Performance Leadership

It is the Professional Development Academy's 10 Year Anniversary. To celebrate, we are offering 10 participants for \$15k when booked in 2024! **reserved seats can be used into 2025**

Next program start dates:

- **High Performance Leadership (12 weeks) \$2995 \$1995 (calendar Attached)**

Next dates: September 16 - December 20, January 13 - April 18

Provides best practices in leadership, organizational development and change management, negotiation and collaboration, effective business communication, and delivering value within high performance management. Video that helps explain the value of the program from Alumni.

- **Leading on Purpose (8 weeks) \$2995 \$1250 or 2 for \$1500**

Next dates: October 21 - December 20

Made specifically for Academy Alumni, Leading on Purpose unpacks workplace culture, individual belonging, and the movement from intention to impact as it pertains to leadership in organizations.



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- **Leading in Analytics (8 weeks) \$2995 \$995**
Next dates: October 21 - December 20
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- **Cybersecurity Leadership (12 weeks) \$2995 \$1995**
Next dates: January 13 - April 18
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County Auditors and Treasurers Form New Joint Association

Ann Estvold | NDACo Communications Intern

The County Auditors Association and the County Treasurers Association voted to combine associations at their annual conference on July 9-11 in Fargo. The group will now be known as the North Dakota County Auditors' and Treasurers' Association (NDCATA).

McKenzie County Auditor/Treasurer Erica Johnsrud explained that the combination was explored to create efficiencies. Another reason for the combination was the increasing number of combined auditor and treasurer offices throughout the counties.

"The offices of auditor and treasurer work very closely with one another throughout the course of the year. Our conferences have already been combined for many years as there are many topics and information that overlap the two offices. We have also shared an Executive Director for many years who we worked with collaboratively during legislative sessions and on other topics," said Johnsrud.

She stated that the two organizations have been discussing this merger for around 18 months. "We surveyed the membership, shared feedback with everyone, and discussed concerns at our conferences and meetings," Johnsrud said. The groups also looked at their structures, dues, committees and membership

feedback. A formal vote was held at the recent conference, passing 71 to 11.

Johnsrud said there will be few changes to the associations' by-laws and organization as the existing ones were already quite similar. "We also took this as an opportunity to streamline the committees. So, we eliminated some committees that were not needed and kept others that were the same between the organizations. We also kept one committee for auditors specifically, the Election Committee, and one committee for treasurers specially, the NACO/NAFTCO Committee, which existed in each separate association, but not the other."

"Additionally, the NDACo Board of Director representatives for the Auditor and Treasurer are now part of the Executive Committee, which ensures that there is always a voice in the executive committee for auditors and treasurers specifically," she continued.

Currently, 24 of the 53 counties in North Dakota have combined the position of Auditor and Treasurer. The decision to or not to combine the offices is determined by the local boards of county commissioners. The merger of the two associations has no bearing on this decision.



Back row (L to R): President Sally Whittingham (Dunn Co), 1st Vice President Sandy Fossum (Richland Co), NDACo Board of Directors Representative Erica Johnsrud (McKenzie Co). Front row (L to R): 2nd Vice President Maureen McGilvrey (Stutsman Co), NDACo Board of Directors Auditors' Representative Shirley Murray (Sheridan Co), Secretary/Treasurer Marisa Haman (Ward Co).



Panel of speakers from When Tragedy Strikes: Lessons Learned from the Hatton-Northwood School Bus Crash.



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Always Find a Sober Ride

Leah Kelm | Vision Zero SE Regional Outreach Coordinator

The Red River Valley Fair may have mixed things up this year by holding their annual event over three weekends, but one thing that didn't change was the partnership of Vision Zero's ND Sober Ride program.

For the third year, Lyft code vouchers for a \$10 off discount were available for fair goers to help promote the importance of always having a sober ride. Preliminary numbers show that 134 rides were utilized throughout the Fair this year.

Crashes related to alcohol and drug use are 100% preventable. Driving impaired is a choice, and many lives would be saved in North Dakota each year if the decision to drive sober or find a sober ride was always the choice being made.

Since the program's launch in March 2021, ND Sober Ride has provided nearly 2600 sober rides. Vouchers, primarily funded by AAA – The Auto Club Group, are available throughout the year targeting holidays and events where someone may overindulge. Companies interested in becoming a part of the solution can sponsor ND Sober Ride by contacting NDDOT Safety Public Information Program Manager, Lauren Wahlman at lwahlman@nd.gov.

To learn more about the ND Sober Ride program and North Dakota's Vision Zero initiative, please visit VisionZero.ND.gov.



Autonomous Trucking Conference Set for October 16-17 in Bismarck

The benefits of autonomous trucking to the state and the challenges faced in implementing the technology will be key topics of the North Dakota Autonomous Trucking Conference to be held in Bismarck, October 16-17.

The event, being planned and hosted by the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute (UGPTI) at North Dakota State University, will bring together stakeholders from the trucking and autonomous vehicle industries, technical experts, highway safety specialists, enforcement personnel, regulator agency staff, local and Tribal government staff, and researchers to engage in dialog, exchange ideas, and identify common interests and concerns. To register for the conference or to learn more, go to: www.ugpti.org/events/atc2024/.

"It is clear that autonomous trucking will be implemented across the country," noted UGPTI Director Denver Tolliver. "Our goal is to bring all of these stakeholders together to discuss how we employ this technology in North Dakota in a way that enhances our economy, addresses workforce issues, and improves safety."

Key topics to be addressed at the conference may include:

- Critical rural road safety issues that can be mitigated by autonomous trucks
- Market potential for autonomous trucks in North Dakota and the region
- Willingness of trucking companies to invest in and use autonomous vehicles

- Key labor shortages that can be addressed by autonomous trucking
 - Preparedness of state and local agencies to enforce traffic safety and adjust planning priorities to facilitate autonomous trucking
 - Acceptance of autonomous trucks by the driving public
- The event is funded by a grant from

the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. The conference is part of a two-year project to explore various deployment options, routes, and practices and to quantify the safety, regulatory, energy, environmental, and economic impacts of autonomous trucking in the region.



SAVE THE DATE

AUTONOMOUS TRUCKING CONFERENCE

OCTOBER 16-17, 2024
RADISSON HOTEL • BISMARCK, ND
Focus on Rural Road Safety and Autonomous Trucking

Registration is open @ WWW.UGPTI-ORG/EVENTS/ATC2024/

Toolkit Now Available:

Operation Green Light for Veterans

Operation Green Light for Veterans will take place November 4-11, 2024.

A toolkit is now available, with press release, resolution template, and social media templates, among other resources to support county participation, at www.naco.org/program/operation-green-light-veterans.

America's counties have a long and proud history of serving our nation's veterans, a legacy that continues to this day as we work with our federal, state and local partners to ensure that the former service members have access to the resources they need to thrive.

Once again this Veterans Day, the National Association of Counties (NACo) and the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO) invite the nation's 3,069 counties, parishes, and boroughs to join Operation Green Light and show support for veterans by lighting our buildings green from November 4-11, 2024. By shining a green light, county governments and our residents will let veterans know that they are seen, appreciated and supported.

Recorders Roll Into Stark County for Annual Convention

Ann Estvold | NDACo Communications Intern

The 95th Annual North Dakota County Recorder's Convention was held June 18-21 in Dickinson. Surveyors spoke to the group about the surveying process and the new forms being used. Aaron Birst did *Stump the Chump*, answering questions that Recorders had submitted before the conference. Then the group had vendor visits and headed to Paragon Bowling Alley for dinner and evening entertainment.

On June 19, members participated in two ILG courses, Fraud Alert presented by Peter Ollis from Fidlar Technologies and Remote Online Notaries (RON) presented by Paula Bachmeier from The Title Team. ND Secretary of State Michael Howe spoke about what is happening at the Secretary of State's Office. Representatives from the ND Department of Transportation spoke of their issues with recording in different counties and what issues they were having. Darin Meschke presented the new Marriage License Program that will be rolling out in 2025, and Adam Watkins from Fidlar Technologies spoke on Daniels Law.

Thursday, June 20, featured a Tyler/Document Pro User Meeting, a



presentation on PRIA and the Business Meeting. New officers elected include President: Heidi Anderson, McLean County; Vice President: Missy Hanson, Burleigh County; Secretary: Jackie Babbitt, Richland County; Treasurer: Bev Bachmeier, Ramsey County; Past President: Carrie Krause, Wells County. Motion was made by Amber Fahey to accept the movement of the current officers up, and to add Bachmeier as Treasurer, and the motion was seconded by Melissa Vachal. Motion carried.



North Dakota Elections

From page 1

connected to the Internet and contain no components for such a connection. Every county in North Dakota uses the same election equipment. Election equipment is tested extensively before being approved for use in the U.S., and county auditors conduct logic and accuracy testing before every election to verify that equipment is 100% accurate and secure.

Logic and accuracy test results are cleared before the equipment is locked and sealed with unique numbered tags for security. Before opening the polls on Election Day, election officials verify the unique seal numbers and ballot tabulators to ensure they have not been tampered with. Ballots cast in statewide elections are securely stored for 22 months, as required by federal and state law, under the supervision of the County Recorder.

Election results are verified at multiple levels. After polls close, a nonpartisan election board at each polling site certifies results using a canvass report which provides an accounting of the votes cast for each contest. Thirteen days after the election, the county canvassing

board meets to certify county election results. The state canvassing board then reviews and certifies statewide, legislative, and judicial results submitted by all 53 county canvassing boards. Once the state canvassing board certifies the results, they become official.

Make a Plan to Vote

You can support North Dakota elections by encouraging people to make a plan to vote. North Dakota offers many voting options: absentee, at a polling location on election day, or early voting at a polling location (if their county offers this option). North Dakota's Voter ID Law applies to all voting methods, so voters should ensure their ID is up-to-date before an election.

The address on a ND driver's license or ND non-driver ID can be updated online through the North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT) website at dot.nd.gov or at an NDDOT Driver License site. Information about voting options for a voter who hasn't updated their identification or forgets to bring it with to a polling location can be found at vote.nd.gov.

The North Dakota Office of the Secretary of State has information to help voters make a plan for voting at My Voting Information portal at vote.nd.gov/myvotinginfo. By entering their address, a voter can see their polling locations, hours of operation, and whether they have an option to vote early. Voters can also access a sample ballot through the portal to inform themselves of the contests and measures they will be voting on. Voters can also submit an application for an absentee ballot through the portal. Qualified voters who submit an absentee ballot application will be mailed to them beginning September 26. Absentee ballots must be postmarked by November 4 or delivered to the county auditor by 5 p.m. on November 4.

Appreciate County Election Workers

North Dakotans run North Dakota elections. Our family, friends, and neighbors serve as nonpartisan county auditors, election board members, poll workers, and canvassing board members.

North Dakota needs about 3,000 poll workers to assist with the General

Election. One of the best ways to support North Dakota elections is by volunteering to serve in this important role.

Poll workers help set up and prepare their assigned polling location, welcome and check in voters, issue ballots, and help close the polls at the end of election day. They also assist voters by demonstrating how to use voting equipment and explaining voting procedures.

Poll workers must be at least 16 years old, a U.S. citizen, and a resident of North Dakota. They must be able to attend a training session and are paid for their work. To volunteer as a poll worker, contact your county auditor.

Election workers take their jobs seriously and provide an added level of security and protection for our election processes. When you see them at a polling location or in your community, take the time to thank them for the commitment they have put into running North Dakota elections with integrity.

NDACo Staff Member Takes on Additional Role as a Member of a Local Draft Board

Ann Estvold | NDACo Intern

Did you see the article in the May/June issue about the Selective Service Boards? Well Patrick Engelhart, CEG Safety Specialist at NDACo, did and decided to sign up.

“I saw an article in the County News stating that volunteers were needed for local Selective Service boards. I’m a veteran and civically minded person, so I volunteered and voila! I have been now appointed to the Burleigh County board,” said Engelhart. “It is pretty cool that the SSS regional director appoints Board members *in the name of the President of the United States.* (see picture) That does not happen every day. I sincerely hope that the SSS local boards will never need to be activated, but I am proud to be part of a group that is ready to fulfill our patriotic duties if that dreadful day ever comes,” said Engelhart.

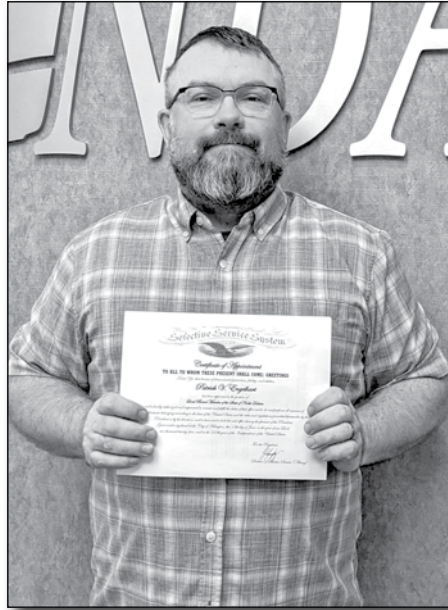
State Director of the Selective Service System (SSS), Tony Mutzenberger, stated that he received a few inquiries from the article in the May/June issue. He appointed four new members this past month and two of them specifically mentioned the article as their reason for applying. Top of Form

Mutzenberger has also been making visits to county offices and reaching out to local leaders to help get the word out. He stated that this process has worked very well in the past and he has great support from the county employees.

A Selective Service Local Board is a group of five citizen volunteers whose mission, upon a national draft, will be to decide who, among the registrants in their community, will receive deferments, postponements, or exemption from military service based on the individual registrant’s circumstances and beliefs. “One big change in the last year has been that we now are able to fill all five positions,” said Mutzenberger.

“In the past, the approach from the national level had us filling only one position for each county during peacetime, with the idea that we would fill the remaining positions someday when/if needed, as part of standing up the rest of the infrastructure needed for a draft. Unfortunately, what often happened is that we turned away potential applicants and then later that board member would retire or move and then we were back to ‘zero positions filled’ for that county,” continued Mutzenberger.

The new goal is to fill as many of the five positions as possible during peacetime rather than trying to fill



Patrick Engelhart

them after a draft is in progress. The Board Member program is one of the primary components of the SSS. Over 11,000 volunteers are currently trained in Selective Service regulations and procedures so that if a draft is reinstated, they will be able to fulfill their obligations fairly and equitably.

The appointment process for new Board members involves application, a vetting process, background check, endorsement by the ND Governor’s Office, appointment at the national level and the completion of the initial online training. The initial training is an 8-hour online session and then members participate in annual training by reviewing sample cases similar to real-life situations.

“The training covers the history of the Selective Service System, how it operates, and the duties and responsibilities of being a Local Board member. In the future, there may be refresher training and exercises to participate in, but it is my sense that the time commitment for such things is flexible and minimally onerous,” said Engelhart.

“One of the concerns people sometimes voice is that they are hesitant to take on another service position that will take up more of their time with meetings. In some of those counties with smaller populations, many of the same people end up serving in those positions, so I can understand why people might be hesitant to take on one more obligation. The reality is that we do not do meetings so there is very little commitment during peacetime, after the initial appointment and training. It’s just a matter of being on the list and willing to serve someday if/when we actually have to stand up the boards,” said Mutzenberger.

Local Board members are appointed by the Director of Selective Service in the name of the President. Members may also be appointed on recommendations made by their respective state governors or an equivalent public official.

To become a Board member the applicant must be a U.S. citizen, at least 18 years of age, live in the county in which the board has jurisdiction and be willing to spend enough time at the position to accomplish the required training. Applicants may be a retired or active member of the Armed Forces or any Reserve component. However, this is not a requirement, and ordinary citizens may apply.

“One of the priorities this next year will be to fill more positions in some of those counties where we currently have zero positions filled, such as we have in the southwest corner of the state,” said Mutzenberger. He is also hoping to

engage with some of the Military Affairs Committees and work through state legislators. See attached map for the counties that have vacancies.

“The ideal situation is when the local leaders will actively connect me with potential applicants, people they feel would do a good job for their county.... This results in applicants who are already endorsed by leaders at the local level, someone they would want to have in these positions if we ever had to stand up the boards,” said Mutzenberger

If you are interested in serving as a Local Board member, you may apply online at <https://www.sss.gov/volunteers/request-info>. “Applying to become a Board member is easy as well. The easiest way to get the ball rolling is to submit a volunteer Board member application at [sss.gov](https://www.sss.gov),” said Engelhart. You can also contact the State Director of the SSS, Tony Mutzenberger, at tmutzenberger@sss.gov.

You don’t hire engineers who are “good enough.” You hire the very best.

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Apex
Engineering Group

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Annual Report 2024



NORTH DAKOTA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES



State of the Counties

I find it hard to describe the amount of change counties have experienced in the past year without it sounding like exaggeration. The 2022 election brought in over 50 new county leaders and a week rarely goes by without us hearing about upcoming retirements of longtime county friends across the state.

On top of that, the state legislature – a quarter of whom were rookies themselves – handed counties the challenge of figuring out how to replace the pension system most of them participate in.

But change is good, right? It certainly can be. I am optimistic about our future together in the counties. Despite all that will be new and unfamiliar in the future, I believe we will continue to climb our challenges like true mountaineers, tied together, pulling each other up, and always ultimately rising to the top.



Aaron Birst
Executive Director

9-1-1 Services

New Program: Collection and Distribution of 9-1-1 Fees Program: NDACo initiated a Collection and Remittance of 9-1-1 Fees program in January of 2024. The goal was to create efficiencies in the surcharge collection process while helping the counties distribute those surcharges to the appropriate emergency communications programs. Under this new arrangement, telecommunications companies now deliver their line counts to NDACo, instead of to each individual county. NDACo calculates the appropriate surcharge total based on the counties' specific fee and then distributes the surcharges to the appropriate programs with the full remaining balance being returned to the counties. This streamlined the process for both the telecoms and the counties, helped to ensure an accurate surcharge remittance and distribution, and provided transparency and timely payments to the proper accounts.

The Next Generation 9-1-1 program continued work on an IP communications project in 2024. The program expects all local telecommunications carriers will be migrated to IP communications in 2024 with the national carriers completing in 2025. This transition establishes an end-to-end IP network increasing resiliency, interoperability, scalability, and stability. It will also set the foundation for future 911 needs such as pictures and videos being transmitted to 911 centers in real time during an emergency.

The GIS project that underlays the NG9-1-1 GIS program has also been completed. This project was started by the state over 20 years ago but has taken the past 10 years to clean up the state's initial deliverables, getting the data to a point where it could be reliably used for 911 service. NDACo, the ND Department of Emergency Services, and the counties were partners in accomplishing this historic milestone. It is expected that this dataset will also serve other areas of state and local government service since it provides the most up-to-date and authoritative addressing information available.

County Employer Group

For the purpose of "worker's comp," all county employees are covered together – over 7,000 employees in one group, rather than 53 separate employers. This saves money, time and administration. The County Employer Group (CEG) has been modeled in other states due to its success here.

CEG saves money and lives in three important ways:

1. **Safety Training:** To help prevent workplace injuries, the CEG trained about 7,000 employees on safety topics ranging from drug-free workplaces to slips, trips, and falls to bloodborne pathogens. 27 Counties participated in specialized computer-based training and logged over 10,000 hours through online training, including completing nearly 4,000 computer-based safety training courses.
2. **Risk Management** Through the implementation of effective claims management and risk management programs and practices counties have realized discounts of up to 30% in worker's comp premiums. Fifty-six risk managers assist the CEG with compliance issues such as investigations, inspections, injury reporting, and injury prevention, among other duties.
3. **Transitional Return-to-Work Program:** CEG handled 322 claims in 2023, 29 fewer than in 2022. Fewer claims = fewer injuries!

We're proud that CEG's indemnity claim (lost time) is less than half of the average cost of other North Dakota employers, according to ND Workforce. CEG is one of our earliest and most successful programs, a fine example of how we work for the good of all counties.

Vision Zero Outreach Program

NDACo continues to partner with the ND Department of Transportation in the Vision Zero Outreach Program.

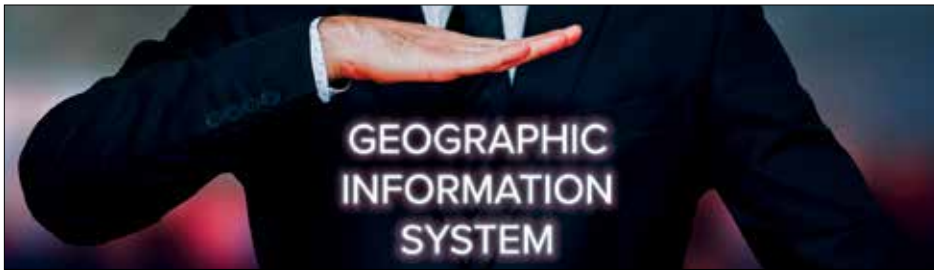
The program now hosts five regional Outreach Coordinators who have been hard at work developing and maintaining partnerships, providing resources, and coordinating outreach activities to support communities to work toward zero motor vehicle crash fatalities and serious injuries.

The Coordinators have widespread partnerships in every corner of the state and continue to push the needle on the importance of traffic safety and safe driving. Coordinators have successfully added 10 Vision Zero Schools across North Dakota. In a Vision Zero School, School staff and participating student leaders create a culture of personal responsibility in their school where motor vehicle fatalities and serious injuries are recognized as preventable and not tolerated.

The mission of Vision Zero relies on personal responsibility to obey traffic safety laws and is implemented through various strategies, including:

1. Widespread public education/outreach
2. Infrastructure/road safety improvements
3. High visibility enforcement of existing laws
4. Technology advancements
5. Working with the legislature to ensure state laws represent best practices in traffic safety

The strategy of Vision Zero is simple: to eliminate motor vehicle crash fatalities and serious injuries in the state.



Geographic Information System (GIS)

Since we launched the GIS Program in 2022, in response to a need in many counties:

- ✓ 10 counties have signed on to the program.
- ✓ 1 county Health Department has signed on to the program for a singular project contract.
- ✓ 1 county met its goals with the program and completed its contract.
- ✓ 😊 In other words, the program is working as intended.

The program has also started to support ND Information Technology’s (NDIT) State Parcel Program with the goal of helping counties across the state to meet and surpass the standards requested by the state.

With this program, NDACo is supporting counties with a qualified GIS professional, Kaitlyn Bakken, who counties maximize use of their GIS data. As with other NDACo programs, the GIS Program is envisioned not to replace county employees or vendor relationships, but to support counties and help them kick start or improve their use of this exciting technology.

The scope of work being done with counties under contract includes:

- Drawing parcels
- Readdressing projects, large and small
- District and precinct maps for interoffice and public use
- Answering questions and helping with projects and software
- Working closely with the State Parcel Program to complete outreach and maintenance tasks.

Goals for the future include:

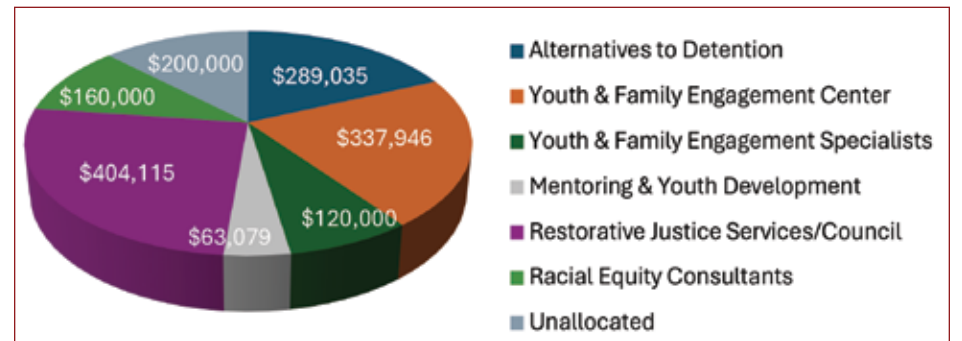
- Gain more Health District contracts to create and host a full dataset of AED’s, Healthbots and NarcanONE Boxes across the state
- Contracting with more counties (13 by end of 2024)
- Informing counties and other agencies about the applications and importance of GIS.
- Continuing education, training and networking

Juvenile Justice Services

To assist counties and local communities with services for at-risk youth and families, the Division of Juvenile Services (a division of the ND Dept. of Corrections) contracts with NDACo to employ North Dakota’s Juvenile Justice Specialist, Lisa Jahner. This position is federally mandated by the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP Act).

In that role, Lisa is responsible for coordinating the development and implementation of the state’s strategic plan for addressing the needs of at-risk youth. To accomplish this, she works with federal, state and local officials on practices and policies, and staffing a Governor’s advisory group established pursuant to the Act to provide leadership and direction.

Over \$1.3 m in federal funding has been allocated to local programs under the current strategic plan, as detailed by the following chart. The overall goal of the funding is to connect youth and families to individualized services in an effort to prevent child welfare and/or juvenile justice system involvement.



North Dakota’s plan for Fiscal Years 2024-26, which will direct \$1.5 m in federal funding, was recently finalized. The main priorities in the plan are increasing school interventions and community-based services, particularly family-based services. The Attendant Care Program will continue to be supported as a collaborative effort with counties and cities, with additional resources for care coordination in order to assist youth and families with connection to services and supports. The plan also includes support for behavioral interventions in schools, increasing the response to mental health issues, and reducing barriers to services for youth and families.

With the award of several federal discretionary grants in addition to the JJDP Act formula funding, NDACo is currently administering close to \$4.0 million in federal juvenile justice grant funds. Almost all of this funding goes out to local government or community-based service organizations.

Board of Directors

The NDACo Board of Directors is made up of one commissioner for each region and one representative from each member association.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- Jayne Tenneson**
President
Nelson/Griggs County State’s Attorney
- Trudy Ruland**
1st Vice President
Mountrail County Commissioner
- Chad Kaiser**
2nd Vice President
Stutsman County Sheriff
- Nick Moser**
3rd Vice President
Cavalier County Commissioner

Steve Lee
Past President
McLean County Commission

COMMISSIONER REGION REPRESENTATIVES

- Beau Anderson**
Region 1
Williams County Commissioner
- Steve Forde**
Region 4
Nelson County Commissioner
- Tony Grindberg**
Region 5
Cass County Commissioner
- Becky Hagel**
Region 6
Foster County Commissioner
- Jamee Folk**
Region 7
Mercer County Commissioner

Scott Ouradnik
Region 8
Slope County Commissioner

MEMBER ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVES

- Shirley Murray**
ND County Auditors Association
Sheridan County Auditor
- Dana Larsen**
ND Association of County Engineers
Ward County Highway Engineer
- Kelly Palm**
ND County Recorders Association
Griggs County Recorder
- Erica Johnsrud**
ND Treasurers Association
McKenzie County Auditor/Treasurer
- Wanda Knutson**
ND County Clerks of District Court Association
Mercer County Clerk of District Court

Kim Jacobson
ND Human Service Zone Directors Association
Agassiz Valley Human Service Zone Director

Lori Hanson
ND County Tax Directors Association
Mountrail County Tax Director

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS

- Robert Wilson**
NACo Board Representative
Cass County Administrator
- Joan Hollekim**
ND County Commissioners Association President
Mountrail County Commissioner
- Perry Turner**
NACo Board Representative
McIntosh County Commissioner

Member Services

While you might say everything we do at NDACo is a member service, there are certain activities that are designed solely to keep us in close touch with you, our county members, to be sure we are meeting their needs.

County Tours

The NDACo Board of Directors has a goal for the County Tours to reach every county approximately every three years, which means four tours per year, averaging five counties per tour. Select NDACo staff, along with the presidents and other officers of NDACo and NDCCA attend the tours. From September 2023 to August 2024, the tours visited 15 counties: Burleigh, Cass, Emmons, Grand Forks, Grant, Mclean, Mercer, Morton, Nelson Oliver, Renville, Sioux, Steele, Traill and Ward.

Onboarding

NDACo welcomed a number of new officials in 2024. Being an off-election year, these were mostly due to retirements. Primarily focusing on traditionally elected officials, we send mail or email messages to new officials to introduce them to the services NDACo offers to help them do their jobs.

Events

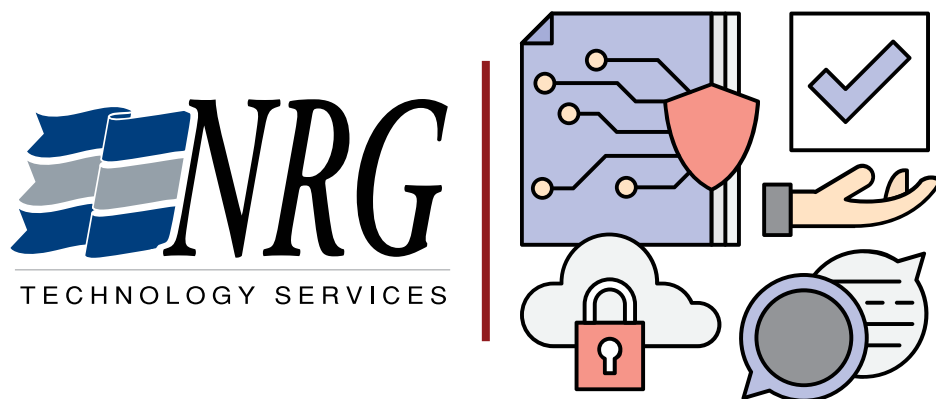
New in 2024, the County Commissioners Summit became the first commissioners-only gathering in four decades. Attended by over 100 commissioners, legislators, staff and state officials, the event received enthusiastic support and is expected to be a regular offering by the ND County Commissioners Association for years to come.

The NDACo Annual Conference serves as the primary training and networking event for all county officials. 2023 saw a continued recovery from having to do the conference virtually in 2020, and we are eager to see continued growth in 2024.

Social Media

We keep in touch through the major social media outlets (below) and encourage county officials to connect with us. We also love to “follow back” our member counties and offices, so let us know if we aren’t following you!

- Website – www.ndaco.org
- Facebook – facebook.com/ndcounties
- Twitter – [@ndcounties](https://twitter.com/ndcounties)
- YouTube – youtube.com/ndcounties



NRG Technology Services

NRG is a subsidiary of NDACo, developed to support the IT needs of all North Dakota counties. NRG’s owners are all North Dakota counties.

NRG works directly with the state’s IT department, NDIT, on issues that affect all counties, meeting with them to discuss the latest issues every six weeks. NRG was asked to present at the Cyber Security Interim committee meeting on behalf of NDACo. Dwight discussed the Cyber Security features provided by the state and the ability of counties to help fund those features.

NRG’s Account Manager has been attending the County Tours with NDACo staff to spread awareness of the purpose of NRG and listen to feedback from all the counties.

NRG’s President sits on the Criminal Justice Information Sharing Board and the State’s Cybersecurity Collaboration Committee. As resources become available, NRG purchases government bonds to help support local governments with financing their projects.

All Human Service Zones should now be using Microsoft 365, provided through DHS and NDIT, for email. They also have access to Teams for increased collaboration.

The tagline Stress-Free IT means their customers let them worry about managing their ever-changing and complex IT infrastructures.

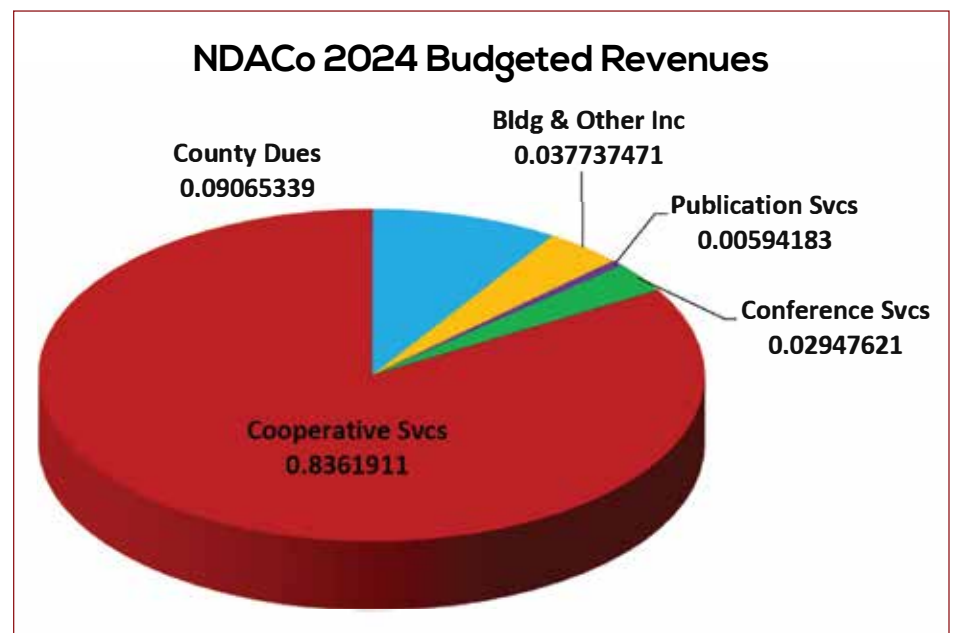
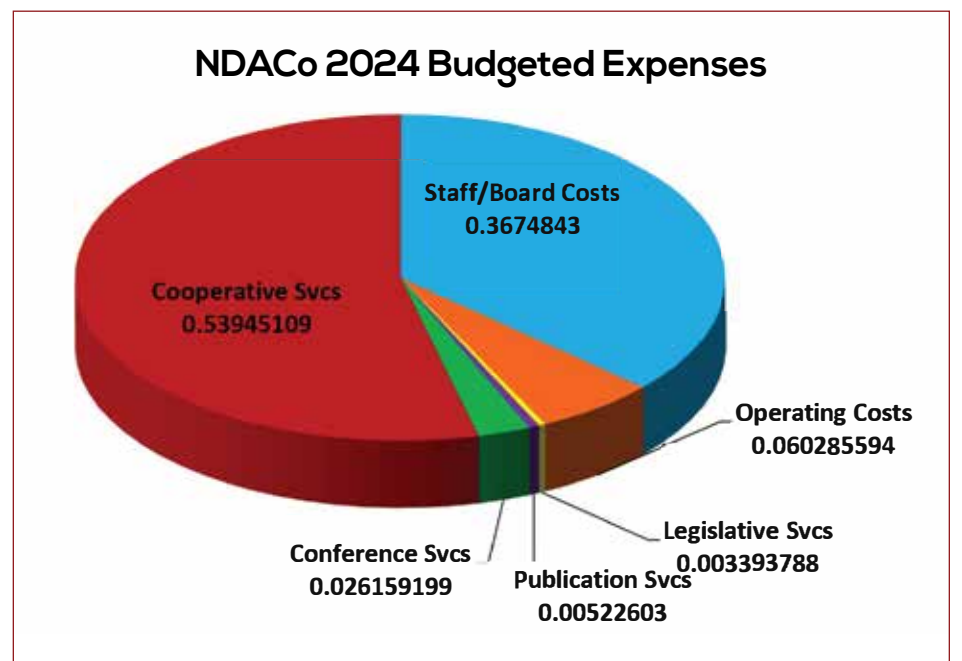


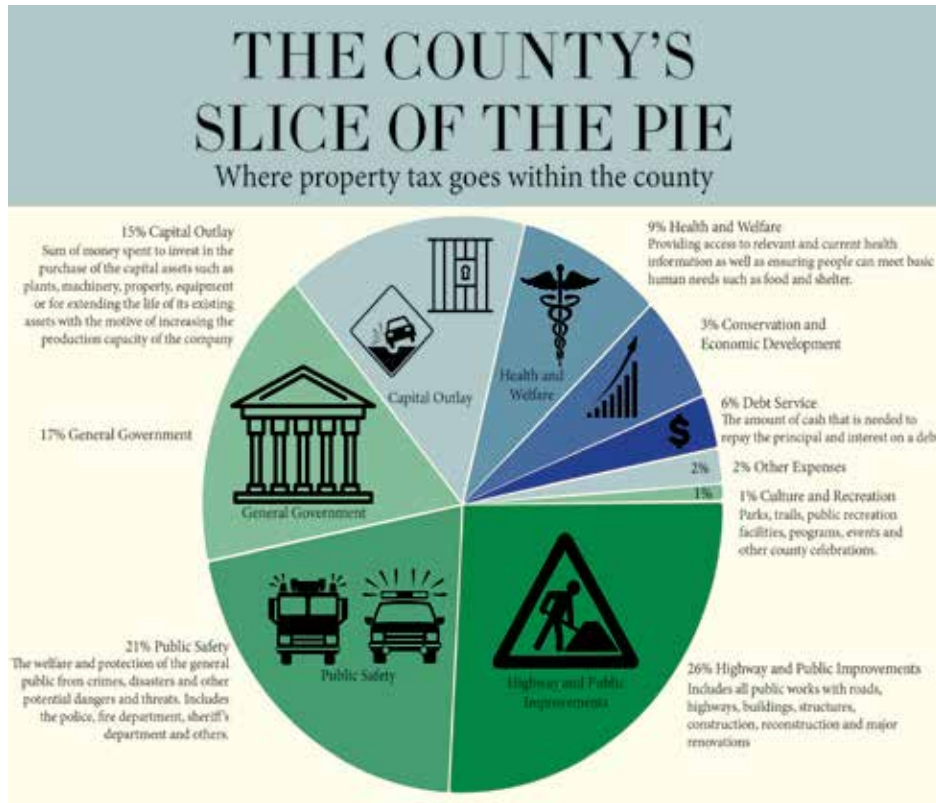
Institute of Local Government

The Institute of Local Government (ILG), the Professional Development arm of NDACo, hosted an amazing variety of training webinars this year. Over the past 12 months, ILG has reached more than 6,000 county officials with more than 70 trainings! Webinars are offered live and on-demand, which make them the perfect professional development solution for county officials and employees.

ILG works with public and private partners from across the state to ensure all courses are provided by highly qualified presenters. The online library of recorded webinars offers a variety of training opportunities and keeps expanding. In the last 12 months, ILG has sent out nearly 1,000 of these recordings. In 2024, ILG will honor around 100 hour-level award recipients!

In addition to webinars, ILG continues to offer training with member conventions and on site by request. ILG trainings are listed on the NDACo website at www.ndaco.org/ilg.





Legislative Services

The 2023 Legislative Session placed counties in a strong position to serve North Dakota. Lawmakers considered nearly 1,000 bills and resolutions. NDACo tracked more than 500 bills. NDACo's advocacy efforts during the session involved testifying at hearings, meeting with lawmakers one on one and gathering information from county officials. Legislative schedules of county related bills are shared with county members weekly and discussed on various member association calls. Weekly updates and the schedule is published on the NDACo Legislative Blog.

A few of the greatest "wins" for counties this session are:

- A more permanent and reliable infrastructure funding formula
- Emergency snow removal cost assistance
- Primary safety belt enforcement
- Continued support and funding for human service zones
- Increased funding for public health, extension, guardianships and law enforcement
- Defeat of harmful legislation related to elections, budgets and property taxes

ND Public Employees Retirement System (PERS)

The Legislature's overhaul of the PERS public pension system was not just the most impactful policy change of the session. It is possibly the most impactful of the past (and future) several decades. PERS has provided defined benefits (pension) to state and political subdivisions for years. Starting sometimes in the next few years, new employees will enroll in a defined contribution plan, similar to a 401k. Current participants in PERS will not be affected, but future legislatures will have to fund the program until it closes out with its last retiree decades from now.

For detailed analysis of the 2023 Session, please visit our Legislative Blog at ndcounties.blog, and select the "2023 Legislative Wrap Up Report – Presentation" link.

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor

The Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor (TSRP) is a joint effort between NDACo and the ND Department of Transportation (NDDOT).

Aaron Birst was North Dakota's first TSRP. When he became Executive Director of NDACo, NDACo contracted with Kristi Venhuizen (the Grand Forks City Prosecutor) to continue providing TSRP services. Kristi was appointed to be District Court Judge in the Northeast Central Judicial District, so in 2024, NDACo hired Peter Halbach. Peter's background includes working as NDDOT Chief Hearing Officer as well as prosecutor and judge.

We look forward to Peter strengthening this important program in the coming years.



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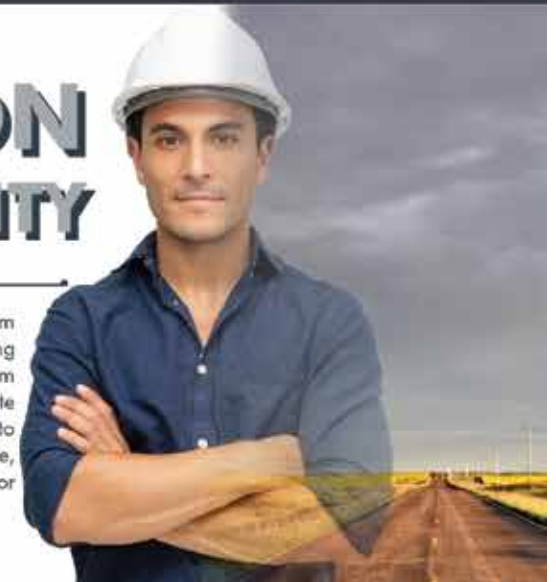
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Embracing a collaborative team approach, Interstate Engineering focuses on building for tomorrow. From projects to career paths, Interstate Engineering knows the best approach to any accomplishment is to collaborate, celebrate success, and grow for tomorrow.



Purchasing Pulse

State Contracts for Vehicle Rentals and Purchases

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

Vehicles are important to government operations. Most entities maintain their own fleet of vehicles and road maintenance equipment. Occasionally, government entities require rental vehicles for in-state or out-of-state travel. The Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) State Procurement Office (SPO) has state contracts for vehicle rentals, purchases and vehicle maintenance available for use by all North Dakota political subdivisions.

If your entity needs to rent a vehicle, you may use state contract #374 - Travel - Vehicle Rental - Nationwide (NASPO ValuePoint) featuring two contractors: Hertz and Enterprise Rent-A-Car. The state contract offers discounted vehicle rental rates, as well as full coverage damage waiver with \$0 deductible and liability coverage up to \$1 million without additional fees or paperwork.

SPO also has a variety of state contracts for vehicle purchases to meet

your needs. These contracts include:

- #300 - Vehicles - 15 Passenger (Including Driver) Cutaway
- #301 - Vehicles - ADA Transit Vehicle
- #373 - Vehicles - Auto Parts - Light Duty (NASPO ValuePoint)
- #375 - Vehicles- 375 Sedans 376A Police Vehicle 380 SUV Passenger Vans & Cargo
- #376-377 - Vehicles - 376 Police 377 Pickups
- #376-377 - Vehicles- 376B-377 Police Vehicles & Pickups
- #376C - Vehicles - Police Vehicles Tahoes
- #378 - Vehicles - Model Trucks
- #379 - Vehicles - Snowplows
- #381 - Vehicles - Frontrunner
- #382 - Vehicles - ADA Low Floor Mini Van
- #386 - Vehicles - Hometown Manufacturing Trolley
- #388 - Vehicles - Hometown Manufacturing Trolley Villager

- #389 - Vehicles - Hometown Villager Coach Bus

Please see the state contract's user summary for more information on how to use these contracts. Go to www.omb.nd.gov/cooperativepurchasing, select the state contracts list and locate contract you are interested in. If you have any

questions related to these contracts, contact Chad Keech at ckeech@nd.gov.

Visit the OMB website at www.omb.nd.gov/procurement for a list of all available state contracts. Questions about a state contract? Contact the State Procurement Officer listed on the OMB website.

North Dakota Receives Top Financial Reporting Award for 32nd Consecutive Year

BISMARCK, N.D.—The Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA) has awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting to the state of North Dakota for its 2023 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR).

"We're honored to receive the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for the 32nd year in a row. It's not every day that you get to celebrate more than three decades of top-notch financial reporting," Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Director Susan Sisk said. "This award is a testament to the dedication and expertise of our ACFR team that pours hours into ensuring our financial reporting is accurate and timely, year after year."

Sisk noted that the ACFR is required to be completed annually by OMB under N.D.C.C. 54-44-04.14 and is part of the state's overall commitment to financial transparency for our citizens.

OMB works with fiscal professionals across state government to complete the report. Sisk and the ACFR team extend their gratitude to state agencies for their continued partnerships.



The Certificate of Achievement is the highest form of recognition in governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government and its management. The report has been judged by an impartial panel to meet the high standards of the program, which includes demonstrating a constructive "spirit of full disclosure" to clearly communicate its financial story and motivate potential users and user groups to read the report.



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4-H is the GOAT!

Jeff Eslinger | County News Editor

Kurt Froelich, Extension Agent in Stark-Billings Counties, extended an invitation to NDACo to participate in the 4-H Leader Showmanship Event on July 27, the final Saturday of the State Fair. I was happy to volunteer. I like animals and I like kids. As I soon found out, I even like animals who *are* kids.

The title of “Leader Showmanship” didn’t bring anything familiar to my mind, and I must confess I may not have read the invitation all that clearly. So, when I learned from my 4-H partner, Layla Krinke of Bowman County, that “Leader” meant me and “Showmanship” meant I was going to be trotting around an arena with a goat on a leash, let’s just say I was mildly surprised. Layla assured me that we would work together as a team, and everything was going to be all right.

Enter Sarla. As I learned from my excellent teacher, Sarla is a Boer goat. She is not a milking goat but is raised for her meat, which is called chevon. I was also happy to learn Layla does not have any specific plans of that nature for Sarla but raised her solely as a 4-H project.

Layla taught me how to lead Sarla, how she should stand when we stop, how to “post up” with her, and to ALWAYS maintain eye contact with the judge.


I wish I could report that I performed well enough to get a blue ribbon for Layla, but I didn’t embarrass myself or get banned from the arena, so I consider the day a success. I believe Sarla even grew to trust me by the time we finished. She’s a sweet goat.

Growing up in Bismarck, I was barely aware of 4-H and certainly did not know the many terrific ways it helps young people develop into leaders. I wish I had. I observed many fine young people, just like Layla, performing their tasks with such confidence and grace.

I am proud to be associated with the important work counties are doing as sponsors of Extension and 4-H. To borrow a term from the Olympics, 4-H is the GOAT (Greatest Of All Time). Keep it up, counties!



L-R Jeff Eslinger, Sarla, Layla Krinke



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

Discussions about the economic and environmental impacts of a \$180 million dairy operation proposed southeast of Hillsboro dominated a recent **Trail** County Economic Development Commission (TCEDC) meeting. Representatives from Riverview LLP, a dairy company headquartered in Morris, Minn., announced plans in June to build a 25,000-cow dairy in Herberg Township about 7 miles southeast of Hillsboro. Executive Director Jim Murphy told TCEDC's board of directors that the proposed dairy farm – which Murphy said would become the largest in North Dakota if completed – could have a major economic impact in Trail County. Based on projections provided by Riverview, the company expects to employ about 100 workers taking home salaries between \$50,000 to \$60,000 a year, he said. In addition, the two-year construction window required to build the dairy would bring in nearly 300 workers during that timeframe, Murphy said. “Next to the (American Crystal Sugar) beet plant, this would be one of the biggest industries in the county ... with a \$6 million annual payroll,” he said. “This is one of the biggest deals to happen in my short tenure here,” said Murphy, who was hired as TCEDC's executive director in August 2018. “This is huge.” Adam Zeltwanger, a partner in Riverview, announced in late June that the planned dairy could take three years to complete. Receiving the required permits, a one-year process that includes getting a stamp of approval from the North Dakota Department of Environment Quality, will be followed by an 18- to 24-month construction window for the dairy, he said.

- Hillsboro Banner

A property owner and an executive director of a nonprofit organization say the water levels in Crystal Springs and Stink lakes in **Stutsman** County have risen so much over the years that they could take a canoe from Crystal Springs to Medina, North Dakota. “This water has been rising for years and we've been fighting it for years in various ways,” said Tim Brenner, executive director of Crystal Springs Baptist Camp. “I've had to move leach fields; I've had to dump loads and loads and loads of rock and riprap to protect shorelines. A significant percentage of the money that we bring in through donations and registration is needed to be directed to mitigate the effects of the rising water. It's just sad because that's not our mission. We don't exist to fight water.”

He said the camp has spent between \$400,000 to \$500,000 to mitigate the rising water. That includes paying for rip rap to keep the driveway above water and gas and electricity to keep water out of buildings.

“The camp would be a literal island if we didn't build that road up,” he said. “The water goes all the way around us. It's connected between Stink Lake and Crystal Springs Lake along the railroad tracks.” Brenner estimated that Crystal Springs Baptist Camp has lost about 100 acres or close to half of its property to Stink Lake.

The road leading to the Crystal Springs Baptist Camp had to be raised and lined with large rocks. Now, Houston Engineering Inc. is preparing a scope and budget for a feasibility study on how to move water from basins in western Stutsman County and Crystal Springs. The study will show the benefits of removing excess waters, how much of the 250-square-mile watershed is contributing to flooding, regulatory issues, alternative options to remove water and the cost to remove the excess water. Stutsman County Commissioner Jerry Bergquist has previously said the drainage map for the western part of Stutsman County shows water draining into the James or Missouri rivers, which is not true. He said the water level in Crystal Springs is expected to rise about 7 to 9 inches per year.

- Jamestown Sun and Fargo Forum

The North Dakota **Public Leaders 4-H Showmanship Event** flipped the script and put state leaders in the boots of 4-H youth. Leaders were coached, and later judged by 4-H members who showed livestock at the 2024 North Dakota State Fair. State leaders who took first place in the State Fair event were: Beef Cattle, **John Fjeldahl**, **Ward** County Commissioner, Berthold, coached by Bennett Johnson, **Mercer** County; Dairy Cattle, Sarah Lovas, chair, State Board of Agricultural Research and Education, Hillsboro, coached by Brekka Kuss, **Stutsman** County; Dairy Goats, Kandi Mikkelsen, North Dakota State Fair Board member, Minot, coached by Devyn Fougner, **Griggs** County; Meat Goats, Beth Richardson, Canadian consul general, Minneapolis, Minnesota, coached by Lilli Steeke, **Bowman** County; Sheep, Lynette Flage, NDSU Extension associate director, Fargo, coached by Gustin Ueckert, **Golden Valley** County; Swine, Sen. Keith Boehm, District 33, Mandan, coached by Cooper Strommen, **Morton** County.

Other state leaders participating and their 4-H coaches were: Drew Combs, North Dakota Trade Office executive director, Bismarck, coached by Elizabeth Hanson, **Ward** County; Congressman Kelly Armstrong, Dickinson, coached by Sydnee Johnson, **Mercer** County; Rep. Karen Rohr, District 31, Mandan, coached by Jarett Sanders, **Oliver** County; Commissioner Sheri Haugen-Hoffart, Public Service Commission, Bismarck, coached by Jacob Sand, **Bottineau** County; Mohamed Khan, NDSU Extension assistant director, ANR, Fargo, coached by Marie Sand, Bottineau County; Woodrow (Chip) Poland, director of Agriculture and Technical Studies, Dickinson, coached by Eleanor Carlson, **McLean** County; Chloe Drummond, 4-H Foundation coordinator, Fargo, coached by Tessa Sigvaldson, **Williams** County; Kevin Black, Minot Area Chamber Economic Development Corp. board member, Minot, coached by Maggie Iverson, **Cavalier** County; Rep. Paul Thomas, District 6, Velva, coached by Morgan Keen, **Ward** County; Sen. Kristin

Roers, District 27, Fargo, coached by Rudi Wendel, Cass County; Sen. David Hogue, District 38, Minot, coached by Faith Carpenter, Ward County; Jeff Eslinger, Communications Director, **North Dakota Association of Counties**, Bismarck, coached by Layla Krinke, **Bowman** County; Sen. Judy Estenson, District 15, Warwick, coached by Rosie Abraham, **Griggs** County; Rep. Vicky Steiner, District 37, Dickinson, coached by Tessa Dvorak, **Dunn** County; Rep. Matthew Ruby, District 40, Minot, coached by Rachel Schmidt, **Oliver** County; Twyla Baker, president, Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College, New Town, coached by Bailey Hokanson, **Williams** County; Greg Lardy, Joe and Norma Peltier vice president for NDSU Agriculture, Fargo, coached by Haley Mcleod, **Ransom** County; Sen. Jeff Barta, District 43, Grand Forks, coached by Graesen Helgoe, **Pembina** County.

- Minot Daily News

(see related story p. 17)



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Bismarck Seeks Opinion From Attorney General on Citizen Petition Deadlines

The city of Bismarck is seeking guidance from the state attorney general regarding the time frame signatures can be gathered for citizen-initiated petitions. City officials are seeking clarification on whether the city's use of state law, which requires petitions to be submitted within a year, violates its home rule charter and the petition rights of residents. The City Commission last month gave City Attorney Janelle Combs the go-ahead to send an opinion request to North Dakota Attorney General Drew Wrigley. City staff have indicated that they are unsure when a response will be received. The question pertains to a petition initiated by former Bismarck Mayor Marlan Haakenson that seeks to roll back property taxes and utility rates to their 2018 levels and require any future tax increase be approved by voters. Haakenson has said he intends to continue gathering signatures despite the petition exceeding one year in circulation, according to a memo from Combs' office. The petition was initially approved for circulation on Nov. 23, 2022. Bismarck residents can initiate petitions due to the city's status as a "home rule charter city." In North Dakota, a home rule charter gives cities additional self-governing authorities, such as levying taxes for city expenses, controlling city elections and enacting ordinances. Bismarck voters narrowly approved the enactment of the city's home rule charter during a special election in January 1986. Bismarck's home rule charter lays out "powers reserved to the people," a framework for how resident petitions work within the city. The ordinance specifies many measure requirements, such as the number of signatures required, according to Combs' letter to Wrigley. However, she added, the ordinance doesn't "outline how long a petition can be circulated and for how long signatures remain valid prior to the presentation of said petition." Because of this, the city follows a state law that imposes a one-year limit on citizen petitions, since its home rule charter does not include a provision that would override the state statute. "It is (the city's) position that we appropriately rely on the time requirements for the circulation of petitions under (North Dakota) century code," Assistant City Attorney Stephanie Pretzer told The Tribune.

Court Dismisses Challenges to North Dakota's Pore Space Statutes

BISMARCK – Attorney General Drew Wrigley has announced that his office won dismissal of legal challenges brought against the state by multiple organizations opposed to laws permitting the State to regulate the development of pore space reservoirs for CO2 storage.

North Dakota's geology contains an abundance of pore space reservoirs—porous geologic formations deep underground—that experts say are capable of permanently and safely storing significant quantities of CO2. Landowners own the pore space beneath their land, and the pore space storage of CO2 offers the potential for significant additional income to many landowners across the State. State law enables the Industrial Commission to amalgamate (or pool) the ownership interests in pore space reservoirs when

a supermajority of the impacted owners want their interests in the reservoir developed, so long as all owners, including any dissenting minority of owners, receive their equitable share of compensation. The vast majority of landowners have voluntarily agreed to have their pore space reservoir interests used for CO2 storage in exchange for appropriate compensation.

Last summer, two organizations brought suit alleging State laws pertaining to pore space amalgamation are unconstitutional. Yesterday, the District Court in Bottineau County held that the organizations' claims were not viable as pleaded, agreeing with the State that the blanket legal challenges were in large part barred by the statute of limitations, and that the challenges to the face of some of the statutes were improper.

"Yesterday's decision is a positive victory for the vast majority of landowners in North Dakota who recognize that our state is on the cutting edge of developing pore space reservoirs for CO2 storage, producing significant additional income for property owners," said Attorney General Wrigley. "What seems to get lost in some conversations around this topic is that State law only permits pore space reservoirs to be pooled when a supermajority of the owners want them to be developed. When a pooling order is entered, every impacted landowner receives their equitable share of compensation. Yesterday's decision may not end all litigation over this issue, but it was a good start, and our office will address any further legal challenges that may arise."

North Dakota Property Taxes

MEASURE 4

End Unfair Property Tax is the campaign behind the initiated ballot measure.

In summary, Measure 4 states:

- Political subdivisions may not raise revenue through levying any tax on assessed value of real or personal property.
- Political subdivisions may continue to levy tax if the tax was dedicated for the payment of bonded indebtedness.
- The State shall provide annual property tax revenue replacement payments to political subdivisions in an amount equal to what was levied in 2024.



SUMMARY OF CONCERNS with the measure:

- 1) Measure 4 does not contain a plan for how the state would cover the estimated \$1.575 billion per year for property taxes to fund essential services.
- 2) It would take away local control of the local budget. Officials in your community know more about your community's needs than those at the state level.
- 3) The revenue replacement funding levels will likely be frozen at 2024 levy levels with no authority for political subdivisions to raise the needed additional revenue to keep pace with growth and/or inflation.



PROPERTY TAXES FUND ESSENTIAL SERVICES

The property taxes you pay directly benefits the development of your community and funds the services available to you as a resident.

Property taxes are collected by local government (city, county, township, school, and park district) to fund essential local public services. The local public services whose funding relies on property tax include, but are not limited to:

SCHOOLS: schools receive approximately 40% of property tax funds

PUBLIC SAFETY: police, sheriff, fire, corrections

PUBLIC WORKS: road maintenance, snow removal, street cleaning, water and waste maintenance

COMMUNITY SERVICES: public parks, pools, recreation facilities, libraries



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Where Are They Now

Ann Estvold | NDACo Intern

A new feature for County News profiles past scholarship winners

Megan (Good) Thielges, daughter of LaMoure County Recorder Laurie Good, received the scholarship in 2015. She graduated from Valley City State University in 2016 with a degree in Elementary Education.

“My mom’s role in county government helped me to realize the value in small town living. I’ve seen how everyone in the building works together for the benefit of all, and the sense of community is really special. We have chosen to raise our family in a small town for some of these reasons,” said Megan.

Megan is now a stay-at-home mom to four children, two of which she homeschools. In her free time, Megan enjoys being outdoors with her family, gardening, baking, golfing, working out and reading.

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



Megan (Good) Thielges and family.

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 Jeff Eslinger at jeff.eslinger@ndaco.org.

NACo Annual Conference Report

Perry Turner | McIntosh County Commissioner and NACo Board Member

The 2024 NACo Annual Conference was held in Hillsborough County, Florida July 12- 15, 2024.

As a NACo Board Member, my work began by participating in the NACo policy process. I was able to join in on several policy steering committee hearings and follow the development of all county policies that impact federal policy.

Ten policy steering committees moved forward with policy resolutions that would eventually be passed or defeated during a general membership meeting.

Several well-attended workshops provided information and discussion regarding the growth and application of generative artificial intelligence, Generative AI. A major theme of the workshops dealt with many opportunities and challenges Generative AI will bring to all counties. Several important suggestions for counties to consider were

1. Train staff. This technology will evolve in a rapidly changing landscape involving new tools and applications.
2. Take all necessary steps to protect security and privacy.
3. When needed, update governance, compliance and accountability.


I also attended the West Region Caucus Meeting on July 15, 2024. The



meeting agenda supported discussions on subjects such as Payments in Lieu of Taxes, a Secure Rural School update and Public Lands legislation.

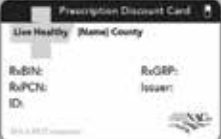
The 2025 WIR Conference will take place May 20-23, 2025, in Pennington County/Rapid City, SD.

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To learn more and enroll your county, visit NACo.org/Health



North Dakota counties were represented well at the National Association of Counties, influencing NACo policies on a number of committees and by voting at the business meeting.

*This is not insurance. Savings may vary by drug and by pharmacy. The Prescription Discount Card is operated by CVS Caremark®. The Discount Medical Organization for NACo Health and Dental Discounts is Alliance HealthCard of Florida, Inc. All rights reserved. ©2022 CVS Caremark



NDPIO Conference

Ann Estvold | NDACo Communications Intern

The North Dakota Public Information Officers Association (NDPIO) recently hosted their 2nd Annual Training Conference on July 15-17 on BSC's campus in Bismarck. Many of the nearly 100 attendees were county information officers.

NDPIO enables Public Information Officers (PIOs) from across North Dakota to build professional relationships and gather for training. The network of PIOs will be an asset to the state if or when an incident occurs, assembling a team to assist is immediate and streamlined.

The annual conference kicked off on Monday with a welcome and opening remarks from Rob Keller, NDPIO President. Arnie Strebe from BisBlox presented *Leadership the LX4 Way*. Christine Townsend from PIO Toolkit presented a ChatGPT Masterclass about ways PIOs can use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to help with tasks and generate ideas. The first day of the conference wrapped up with regional meetings and a Welcome Social sponsored by FlashVote.

Tuesday presented a full agenda of training topics:

- Christine Townsend presented *Knowing your Audience*. Chris Addison, Jill Baber, Jeremy Presnell and Christine Townsend were featured on an AI panel where they discussed how they use AI in their various positions.



Counties were well represented at the 2nd Annual NDPIO Training Conference

- NDPIO presented their Golden Gov Award, which is presented to those who elevate their agency's communications and foster success in public engagement. The recipient was Kayli Richards, Director of Communications for North Dakota Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.
- Daphne Clark from Upper Missouri District Health Unit presented *Critical Thinking with Art* and discussed how we can use art as a creative outlet.
- Lea Greene from the Grand Forks Air Force Base presented *Bad Corn: A Case Study of Public Information Challenges* on her experience dealing with China buying land near Grand Forks Air Force Base.
- A panel including Amy Dalrymple, J.R. Havens, Todd Mitchell and Cecile Wehrman discussed how PIOs and the media can work together.
- Jessica Hitchcock from the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska talked about Tribal Nations and the best way to communicate with them while still respecting their traditions.

On Wednesday, the NDPIO Annual Business Meeting was held. Maxine Herr became the President and Kayli Richards was named Vice President. There was a Legislative Lens panel in which John Bernstrom from the City of Grand Forks and NDACo's Donnell

Preskey discussed how county and city officials can keep up with and advocate for different bills during the upcoming legislative session. The final session featured officials from the City of Fargo and Grand Forks Police Departments discussing the communication process and challenges that they faced when dealing with an officer down incident that occurred almost exactly a year ago.

The conference was dismissed by President Maxine Herr. For more information about NDPIO, visit www.ndpio.org.

Property Tax Measure Approved for November Ballot

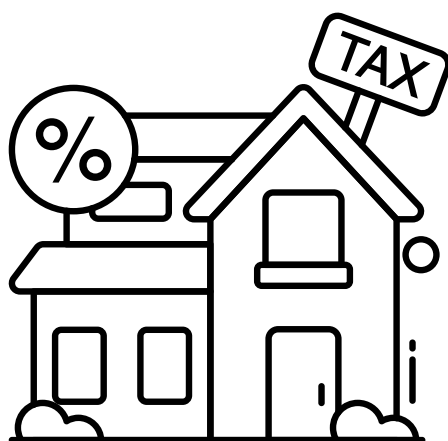
North Dakota Monitor staff – Used with Permission

A ballot initiative that would eliminate assessed value property tax was approved for inclusion on the general election ballot by the North Dakota Secretary of State's Office on Friday.

If approved by voters in November, the initiative would prohibit political subdivisions from "levying any tax on real or personal property except for bonded indebtedness until paid," according to the language approved for the ballot.

Supporters have previously said the measure would not prohibit local subdivisions from levying taxes or fees to homeowners based on parcel square footage, road frontage or building size, among other possible criteria.

Previously, Adam Mathiak, senior fiscal analyst for the Legislative Council, said the measure would cost the state about \$1.3 billion every fiscal year in lost revenue.



The Secretary of State's Office approved nearly 36,000 signatures of the more than 41,000 signatures submitted by the sponsoring committee in June – about 4,500 more than were needed for approval, according to a news release from the office.

More than 5,700 signatures were ruled invalid by the Secretary of State's

Office during the more than monthlong validation period, the news release said. About 1,900 signatures were disallowed because the petition was not circulated to signatories in its entirety; more than 1,000 were invalidated for address omissions; and more than 1,500 were disallowed for inadequate signatures, among other issues.

The property tax measure will appear as Measure 4 on the November ballot next to three measures approved by the Legislature, the office said.

A coalition of more than 60 groups, including NDACo, called Keep It Local announced its opposition to the ballot measure because it would force undue hardships on local governments and threaten funding for emergency services, schools and local senior programs. For more information on the opposition effort, visit www.keepitlocalnd.org.

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Cass County



Kylee Mattison
Grand Forks County



Kelbi Pritchett
Morton County



Abram Sevigny
Walsh County

NDACo Awards Scholarships to Six Students

Bismarck, ND - The North Dakota Association of Counties (NDACo) has awarded \$2,000 scholarships to six students who are children of North Dakota county officials or employees. These exceptional students will be honored at the 2024 NDACo Annual Conference in October.

- **Greg Felchle** - son of Sandra Felchle, Sheridan County Commissioner
ND State College of Science Freshman
- **Christina Larsen** - daughter of Dana Larsen, Ward County Highway Engineer
Minot State University Senior
Christina is the recipient of the Amy Svihovec Memorial Scholarship. Created in 2010, this scholarship honors the memory of Amy Svihovec, daughter of Linda Svihovec, former Auditor and Treasurer of McKenzie County, and is awarded to a scholarship recipient whose goals and achievements carry on Amy's legacy.

- **Tia Madrigga** - daughter of Brandy Madrigga, Cass County Finance Director
Dickinson State University Freshman
- **Kylee Mattison** - daughter of Carmell Mattison, Grand Forks County Assistant State's Attorney
UND Freshman
- **Kelbi Pritchett** - daughter of Tad Pritchett, Morton County Sheriff's Deputy
NDSU Freshman
- **Abram Sevigny** - son of Ed Sevigny, Walsh County Tax Equalization Director
NDSU Freshman

The NDACo Scholarship Fund was established in 1998 with contributions by county donors and Nationwide Retirement Solutions and continues to receive contributions from individual county employees, officials and corporate supporters.

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2024 COUNTY CALENDAR

September

- 9-11 _____ ND Emergency Management Association Annual Conference, Bismarck State College
- 10 _____ Information Technology Committee Meeting, Harvest Room, Capitol
- 10-11 _____ County Tour to Dickey, LaMoure, Richland, Sargent and Ransom Counties
- 11 _____ Retirement Committee Meeting, Roughrider Room, Capitol
- 16 _____ Health Services Committee Meeting, Roughrider Room, Capitol
- 16-19 _____ ND Behavioral Health & Children and Family Services Conference, Bismarck Event Center
- 17 _____ Government Finance Committee Meeting, Roughrider Room, Capitol
- 17 _____ Juvenile Justice Committee, Harvest Room, Capitol
- 17-19 _____ ND Petroleum Council Annual Meeting, Rough Rider Center, Watford City
- 18 _____ Budget Section, Senate Chamber, Capitol
- 18-20 _____ ND League of Cities Annual Conference, Grand Forks Alerus Center
- 19 _____ Tentative – Government Services Committee
- 22 _____ First Day of Fall
- 23 _____ Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, Roughrider Room, Capitol
- 25 _____ Tentative – Human Services Committee

October

- 9-10 _____ Western Dakota Energy Association Annual Meeting, Sleep Inn & Suites, Minot
- 20-22 _____ NDACo Annual Conference, Bismarck Event Center
- 20-26 _____ National Retirement Security Week



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- ▲ Full-line aggregate processing equipment

Travis Hinkley,
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Municipality Meets Quality



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