

Inaugural Capitol Connection a Success

Jeff Eslinger | County News Editor

North Dakota's "political subdivisions" (counties, cities, schools, parks and townships) have a strong history of cooperation and unity. For the first time, these "subs" co-hosted an event to network with legislators, compare notes on issues and update one another on legislative strategies and priorities they hold in common.

Nearly 300 registered for the event, with 180 of those coming from the counties. Despite record cold temperatures, the majority of registrants were able to attend at least one day of the two-day event.

A panel of legislators discussed property tax reform and relief to kick off the event Tuesday, February 18, moderated by NDACo Government/Public Relations Specialist Donnell Preskey. The panel discussed which bills seek to provide reform and which provide various forms of relief. Be sure to check into our legislative blog at ndcounties.blog to see the latest developments on several bills covering these issues.

Following the tax panel, attendees were treated to a primer on the services provided by ND Insurance Reserve Fund (NDIRF) by CEO Keith Pic and a "How To" presentation by North Dakota Chamber CEO Arik Spencer, covering the finer points of legislative advocacy.



ND Senate Majority Leader David Hogue addresses roughly 200 local government official from across the state at the inaugural Local Government Capitol Connection.

Tuesday wrapped up with a social with legislators.

On Wednesday, February 19, the group was addressed by Legislative Minority and Majority Leadership and the leaders

of each subdivision took turns breaking down their legislative priorities. With all the presentations wrapped up, most attendees grabbed a boxed lunch before going to the Capitol to attend hearings

and floor sessions, while others took advantage of the Public Safety Lunch at the Capitol.

See photos on page 13

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Horning Recognized by National NG9-1-1 Group

The NG9-1-1 Institute has honored NDACo Next Generation 9-1-1 Program Manager Jason Horning as the 2025 Government Leader of the year.

Jason's industry successes include establishing interconnection of ESINets between North Dakota, Minnesota, South Dakota and writing the NG9-1-1 Playbook for others to use. He has also been an active contributor to Industry Collaboration Events (ICE) as vice chair of various events and chair of standards committees such as NG9-1-1 Task Force Technical Committee at Texas A&M, NENA's Data Structure Sub-Committee, and Co-chair FGDC Standards.

Jason has also collaborated to author other documents and papers

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Jason and Beth Horning at the NG9-1-1 Honor Reception in the Senate Hart Office Building February 25, 2025.



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Board Member PROFILE



STANLEY DICK
Cavalier County Commissioner
NACo Board of Directors

Family: Wife Peri, married 45 years, a beautiful young gal from Kansas, (she may read this so I need to include this), four sons and a daughter we support from Cameroon, West Africa.

Favorite thing about being a commissioner: I'm a people person and enjoy listening to their stories and helping others in any way possible. I also enjoy being a cheerleader for our county workers. So many times I see where all a person needs is a little encouragement and they blossom. I also have been enjoying my

time working with other commissioners. We have a tremendous group of younger commissioners who have stepped up to the plate to become leaders in our county.

Other things I'm involved in: Giving advice to basketball people. I coached for 21 years and I feel I have some knowledge I can share. The problem is it seems no one is asking for my advice. The larger part of my time is spent farming with a brother, nephew and son. I also am active in supporting the School for the Deaf in Obala, Cameroon, West Africa.

Favorite Movies: *Hoosiers*, a basketball movie, and *Remember the Titans*, a football movie.

Favorite Music: 70s and Contemporary Christian Music.

Book reading now: *Saved*, author Benjamin Hall, Fox News reporter during the start of the Ukrainian war.

Something people may not know about me: I love to cook. I've made every Sunday dinner for our family for all of the almost 45 years of marriage.

Philosophy of life or work: Whatever you do, do to the best of your ability. Except in learning technology, learn just enough to get by. I'm still not a fan of computers.

Favorite Quote: Just heard at our current legislative session. When lobbying for state dollars: "With Shekels comes Shackles."



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FROM the COUNTIES

Legislative Session is Like Calving Season

Howdy from the Ruland Ranch. As I write this, it's a beautiful 40 degrees above zero! Just a few days ago it was 40 degrees below.

The ranchers and their cattle are enjoying the break, but it will be short-lived. The long-term forecast for mid-to late-March is for below normal temps and above normal precip. That should make calving fun!

The legislative session is like the calving season. You start working on it as soon as the previous season/session ends.

There are always those variables that you just have no control over (like the weather!).

During the season/session, it can seem like it will never end. The counties will make it through another legislative season with the help of some very good hands at the NDACo.

Before the session begins, your participation in the resolution process is so important, to guide the NDACo "hands." Now, you can assist them by visiting with your legislators, testifying at hearings and submitting written comments on bills. Get involved.

Before we know it though, it will end. There will be good and not so good. It is very important for everyone to join the NDACo at the Legislative Wrap-Up event at the end of the session. It is an excellent review of all the bills that impact the counties. The



Trudy Ruland | NDACo President
Mountrail County Commissioner

date has TENTATIVELY been set as Wednesday, May 14, and it will be an online event so more can attend.

A couple of reminders...

- April is County Government Month. Have some fun and educate the public about counties!
- County Tours will begin in July. NDACo staff and NDACo and NDCCA Board members will be stopping in to visit seventeen counties before the end of the year. Looking forward to that!

Questions, concerns or just to visit – please don't hesitate to call me. Better yet, stop in at the Ranch. Coffee pot is always on.

FROM the COMMISSIONERS

Thank the NDACo Team

By the time you get this newsletter, it will be past crossover in the Legislature. I want to thank the NDACo Team for all their hard work keeping up on the tremendous amount of bills and resolutions that affect county government. The NDACo Team represents all the counties, and there are different opinions amongst us.

It is evident property tax relief and reform is a top priority. Each taxing district will be affected differently on the property tax and/or valuation caps that are being considered by the legislators. Donnell and Linda sent out valuable information pertaining to the dollars levied per county for the 2024 tax year and the 3% cap; make sure you know how caps will affect your county. Most importantly, make sure you contact your legislators on bills affecting your county. Your voice matters!

Counties will face new challenges after the Session. We need to be receptive to change. I believe counties can always find ways to operate more efficiently. There may be that opportune time, such as when a vacancy occurs, to consider consolidating or sharing services. Recently, Mountrail County met with Burke County to discuss the possibility of sharing a state's attorney. Consolidation or sharing of services can create efficiencies. It is a bonus when taxpayer dollars are saved. Reach out to officials in dual positions to inquire about



Joan Hollekim | NDCCA President
Mountrail County Commissioner

the pros and cons. This may be one way to create efficiencies at the local level.

It was nice seeing many of you at the recent Local Government Capitol Connection event. Having the event in conjunction with other local political subdivisions made for new and interesting conversations outside the realm of county government. Thank you to everyone that contributed to the success of this event. I also want to thank the NDCCA Legislative Committee and to the many others that have been involved in the Friday afternoon conference calls. Your input is invaluable, and greatly appreciated.

I look forward to the sunny days ahead. These sub-zero temps need to disappear.

FROM the ASSOCIATION

Happy Crossover Everyone

For those of you who might not be familiar with that terminology, it means the legislature is at the halfway point – past it, by the time you read this. All the bills in one house (that have passed) are then "crossed over" into the opposite chamber.

This session has had its ups and downs. Governing is certainly no easy task, as all of you know. Although we all would like to think every issue has a "black and white" answer, the reality is, most have complexities that make the "right" answer not always so clear. One of those issues is property tax relief and reform.

North Dakota's many natural resources have been a boon for the state tax coffers. Over the years, the governor(s) and legislature(s) have provided significant infrastructure and property tax buy-downs. They deserve more credit than they get for those investments. Because of those efforts, North Dakota ranks 31 out of 50 for the lowest property tax per capita burden and one national think tank ranks



Aaron Birst | NDACo Executive Director

North Dakota as the 4th best in terms of property tax burden.

That is all not to say our property tax system is perfect. No tax is.

And now that we have made it halfway through the 2025 Session, much of the smoke and noise has gone away, and we have a slightly better understanding of what the legislature and governor are

thinking about property tax relief and reform. We started the session with 60 different bills dealing with property taxes, but we are now down to just a handful.

Although you would think giving money back to folks would be easy, it is actually far from it. The legislature has to weigh such things as who should get tax relief and even more important, how much should that be? The few bills left all have some form of relief but some focus on primary residences while others focus on relief to all classes of property. What most of the bills all have in common is limitations on local spending. NDACo will continue to support all bills that provide property tax relief for those living and working in our great state and will continue to closely monitor those budget restriction bills to attempt to explain the potential negative impact they could have on local service delivery.

As they used to say in the old days of TV shows ... Stay tuned!



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Mental Health First Aid for North Dakota Counties

In the latest survey by the National Association of Counties (NACo), county leaders listed mental health and substance use as crisis-level concerns for their communities. Gallup research showed that 1 in 5 U.S. workers rate their mental health as fair or poor, resulting in four times more unplanned absences.

When employees feel that their employers care about their overall wellbeing, they are three times more likely to be engaged at work.

You can help your county employees become healthier and more engaged with Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training. In doing so, you can help achieve county mental wellbeing goals, like:

- Increasing employee productivity, morale and retention.
- Creating a positive workplace culture that embraces the mental wellbeing of all employees.

- Implementing best practices for self-care and building a resilient mindset.
- Building a common and approachable language around mental health in the workplace.

What is MHFA?

MHFA is a skills-based training administered by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing that teaches people how to identify, understand and respond to signs and symptoms of mental health and substance use challenges in their peers, friends and colleagues. Their vision is to make mental wellbeing, which is thriving regardless of a mental health or substance use challenge, a reality for everyone.

This workplace-specific training program, MHFA at Work, will teach your county employees how to notice

and support an individual who may be experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge or crisis in their work environment and connect them with appropriate employee and community resources. This training is available both in person and virtually.

Quality Health Associates of ND (QUAND) received a grant to provide FREE MHFA courses to anyone in the state of ND, including individuals who come into the state to work and go to school. To be as cost efficient as possible, QUAND provides this course virtually through Zoom, but it is a live, interactive course with two instructors. QUAND offers three courses a month.

For more information and class dates, contact Michelle Lauckner at mLauckner@qualityhealthnd.org or visit www.qualityhealthnd.org.

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Crossover Report

Donnell Preskey | Government/Public Relations Specialist

As NDACo analyzes the first period of the 69th Legislative Session, the word “challenging” comes to mind. There seems to be a strong sentiment to restrict local government this session. It has been a challenge for county officials and NDACo legislative staff to navigate explaining the importance of local control and the difficulty counties will have in responding to local needs when revenues are restricted.

A total of 1,020 bills and 63 resolutions were introduced this Session, the highest since the 2009 Session. Lawmakers passed 69% of the bills introduced, meaning 710 bills have crossed the hall to the opposite chamber. This indicates there is going to be a heavy lift to whittle the number of bills down, especially those with an appropriation. NDACo started the Session tracking 600 of the bills introduced and after crossover we are still involved in monitoring and acting on 425 bills that are county related. The following is a summary of some key topics and priority bills.

PROPERTY TAX RELATED

Lawmakers came into the Session with a strong desire to provide significant property tax relief. During the 2023 Legislative Session, the Legislature approved a \$500 credit for primary residences. All bills being considered increase the amount of relief to taxpayers and many of them expand who would receive relief. At the same time, the momentum behind legislation to restrict local government’s ability to raise taxes has grown.

We started the Session with approximately 60 different property tax-related bills that included relief and reform measures. The Senate killed all their proposals; the House passed over four bills, three of them being packages that include both relief and limitations to local budgets, or caps.

Here is a summary of the remaining property tax-related bills as they crossed over from the House:

HB 1176

- **Relief:** provides \$1,450 primary residence credit, increases threshold to qualify for the homestead credit and increases renter’s credit. Total of \$503 million in relief.
- **Reform:** 3% cap on dollars levied with allowances to carry over unused caps and exceed the cap with voter approval.

HB 1168

- **Relief:** 10 mill buydown on school mills, relief to all property owners. Total of \$120 million in relief.
- **Reform:** 3% cap on dollars levied with allowances to carry over unused caps and exceed cap with voter approval.

HB 1575

- **Relief:** Reduces tax rates on residential, agricultural, commercial. Expands threshold to qualify for homestead credit and increases renter’s credit. Total of \$703 million in relief.
- **Reform:** 3% cap on taxable values. Allows for voter approval to increase mills above levy limit.

HB 1534

- **Relief:** None provided
- **Reform:** 3% cap on taxable valuation, allows to exceed cap by specific percentage with voter approval.

It is uncertain at this point what the Senate Finance and Taxation Committee’s appetite is for amending or combining these bills. Although we believe the Legislature will ultimately regret going down the cap road, it appears caps are on their way. Because of the strong position of the Legislature to restrict local spending, the strategy has now shifted to asking for lawmakers to lighten the cap to avoid severe consequences of diminished local services. NDACo is encouraging lawmakers to consider an indexed cap based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) + 2% to account for high inflation years, as a better option over a flat 3% cap.

SB 2201 was the first bill signed into law. It allows primary residences owned by qualifying trusts to retroactively apply for the 2024 primary residence credit and to be eligible in the future.

A few bills were introduced to address levies that don’t directly impact local property; however, these true reform measures were unsuccessful. **HCR 3012 and SCR 4023** were resolutions to allow voters to repeal the one mill for the state medical center with the intent of the state to fund the medical center through a direct appropriation (\$15 million/biennium) versus an expense to local property taxpayers. Both these resolutions failed. **HB 1572** was introduced to eliminate local levies for Garrison Diversion and NDSU Extension, again with the intent of shifting financial responsibility to the state. Those portions were removed from the bill. The bulk of **HB 1572** now includes changes to the tax statement - **PASSED**.

TRANSPORTATION RELATED

The NDDOT Budget (**SB 2012**) includes new funding for local roads and bridges. Funding concepts from three separate infrastructure bills were rolled into the DOT Budget Bill in the Senate. The greatest policy change is dedicating 100% of the motor vehicle excise tax to roads and bridges. This package includes additional funding and will have a positive impact on funding local road needs.

Active Property Tax Relief and Reform Bills				
Bill Number	Bill Progress	Relief	Reform	Other
HB1168	Passed House	State pays for 10 mills on school mill levy	3% cap on dollars levied by political subdivisions allows carryover of unused cap to next year & for vote (60%) to exceed cap - except schools.	
HB1176	Passed House	\$1,450 Primary Residence Credit. Expands homestead tax credit & renters refund	3% cap on dollars levied by political subdivisions. Allows for carry over of unused cap - once within 5 years and vote to exceed cap in general election for 4 years. Emergency levies exempt from cap.	Yearly assessment notice Only hearing dates mailed to property owners - eliminates estimated tax notice.
HB1534	Passed House	None	Limits taxable valuation of any parcel from exceeding more than 3% year over year. Allows vote to exceed cap for 4 years.	
HB1575	Passed House	Reduces tax rates (state pays difference) Residential reduced by 2.75% Ag and Commercial reduced by 1.5%. Expands homestead tax credit & renters refund	Limits taxable valuation of any parcel from exceeding more than 3% year over year. Allows vote to increase mill levy authority for up to 6 years in general or primary.	

Here is a summary of what is included in the bill:

- Flexible Transportation Fund grows to \$447 million
 - 100% of the motor vehicle excise tax (\$360 million)
 - 1% of Legacy Fund Earnings (\$87 million)
 - 50% of Flexible Transportation Fund to NDDOT (\$223 million)
 - 50% split into six buckets for local roads and bridges (\$223 million)
 - Non-oil County and Township Roads and Bridges (\$56 m)
 - County and Township Bridges (\$56 m)
 - County and City Formula Distribution (\$28 m)
 - City Grants (\$28 m)
 - Non-oil Township Formula Distribution (\$28 m)
 - Non-oil Township Grants (\$28 m)

The House approved a gas tax increase to help fund local roads. **HB 1382** increases the gas tax \$0.03 and generates an estimated \$43 million to be distributed to non-oil counties, cities, and townships.

The Prairie Dog bucket got a nice addition in the OMB Budget Bill (**HB 1015**), increasing it from \$170M to \$220M. This is to keep distributions whole if **SB 2397** passes. **SB 2397** redefines low-oil producing counties as non-oil producing. There are five counties and 187 townships this would impact. The \$50 million in additional Prairie Dog funds in **HB 1015** would ensure distributions to cities, counties and townships would not decrease. In addition, House Appropriators decreased the amount deposited into the Strategic Investment and Improvements Fund that sits ahead of the Prairie Dog buckets from \$400 million to \$270 million. This would decrease the

amount of oil and gas production tax revenue that is required to be deposited in other priority buckets prior to reaching non-oil counties, townships and cities. It is important to note that during a recent legislative revenue forecast, the state is predicting that the prairie dog buckets will likely not fill in the 25-27 biennium.

Other important transportation bills that have passed: **HB 1444** allows counties to add township roads to the county system if it is determined a local road meets the criteria in the county road system definition. **SB 2183** increases the violation fee of speeding in construction work zones from \$80 to \$150. The speed limits must be followed even if construction workers are not present in the construction zone.

The House defeated **HB 1407** which would have increased weight limits for vehicles on the state and local roads from 80,000 to 113,000 pounds. The Senate defeated **SB 2208**, which would have penalized counties/townships that passed an ordinance or policy that exceeded state statute to restrict agriculture or energy infrastructure projects by prohibiting them from receiving Prairie Dog funding.

PUBLIC SAFETY RELATED

Several priority public safety-related bills are still in play as we enter the second period of the Session, even if they have been amended. NDACo worked with several legislators to introduce bills to address jail funding. **HB 1197** and **HB 1213** have both been amended but will provide some relief to those counties looking at jail improvement projects. **HB 1197** was turned into a study of correctional needs, and **HB 1213** is intended to dedicate \$50 million in low-interest loans for jail improvements. **HB 1344** was approved to clarify that NDDOCR will reimburse counties for housing state-sentenced inmates when the state system is experiencing overcrowding.

The Attorney General’s Truth in

Sentencing bill, **SB 2128**, which forces violent offenders to serve a greater portion of their sentences in prison, has passed over to the House.

Several bills focused on rewarding those in public safety have found success. **HB 1193** has been amended to mirror the Back the Blue Grants approved in the 2023 Session to provide \$3.5 million in recruitment and or retention bonuses to local law enforcement and corrections officers. **HB 1419** would allow 9-1-1 dispatchers and EMS to enroll in the NDPERS public safety plan, if their county offers the plan. **SB 2093** expands the income tax deduction for retired law enforcement to surviving spouses. The Senate turned **SB 1371** into a study of health insurance for retired peace officers.

Here are a few other public safety bills worth noting:

SB 2277: Designates Highway 200 as ND Fallen Peace Officers Highway – **FINAL PASSAGE**.

SB 2098: Improvements to criteria for issuing Silver Alerts – **PASSED**.

SB 2365: Prohibits judges from waiving 24/7 fees – **FAILED**.

FINANCE/ELECTION RELATED

Auditors of course are closely watching the property tax-related legislation and the technical aspects of those bills that will impact budgeting, statements, notices, etc. A success was the defeat of HB 1384 which sought to require that the county

auditor be elected, along with the defeat of **HB 1306** which would have expanded the number of free hours to respond to open record requests from one to 40 hours. This bill met heavy opposition from county officials. An effort to reduce publication requirement for counties failed in the House with the defeat of HB 1380.

A handful of election-related bills were introduced, all those of concern were defeated:

- **HB 1587**: Related to post-election audits and required ballots to be hand counted

- **HB 1287**: Established voter registration

- **SB 2178**: Required separate ballots for each party for the primary election

PUBLIC HEALTH RELATED

Local public health units will continue to seek an additional \$2 million dollars for a total of \$10 million in state aid funding in the Department of Health and Human Services Budget, **HB 1012**. State aid funding is critical, flexible funding assistance to fill gaps and cover the many responsibilities local public health units have that aren't earmarked through designated funding. This funding increase is especially important with the threat of the state mandating local government budget restrictions.

Two septic system bills were introduced on each side and both passed.

HB 1541 moves to the Senate with support from local public health units, the plumbing board and environmental health practitioners. Authority to create rules related to licensing, permitting, and inspecting septic systems lies within the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). **SB 2267** places licensing and oversight of septic systems with the plumbing board which continues to oppose "private sewage disposal systems" oversight, stating it is a separate discipline from plumbing.

Data collection from the Youth Tobacco Survey and Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) are at risk in **SB 2105** which was passed in the Senate. Currently, these two data sources are the only two of their kind and offer insight into areas such as dietary behaviors, sleep, mental health issues, tobacco/vaping use, safety concerns, and physical activity. Questions for the YRBSS survey are selected through a committee of stakeholders including HHS Public Health, HHS Behavioral Health Division, DPI, DOT, Community Organizations and Regional Education.

Other public health-related bills worth noting:

- **SB 2308**: Removes the Onsite Wastewater Technical Review Committee and moves authority to create septic system rules to DEQ – **PASSED**.

- **SB 2281** and **HB 1570**: Proposed increases to tobacco tax – **FAILED**.

- **SB 2255**: Pertains to qualifications, term, and duties of the state health officer – **PASSED**.

OTHER BILLS OF COUNTY IMPORTANCE:

- **HB 1602**: Allow political subdivisions to opt out of NDPERS defined contribution plan – **PASSED**.

- **HB 1096**: Reduce 9-1-1 service fee to 2.5%, returning additional funds to support 9-1-1 system – **FINAL PASSAGE**

- **HB 1310**: Eliminate fees for defendants, which would have reduced the amount of dollars going into the court improvement grants – **FAILED**.

HB 1141: Prohibit state or political subdivisions engaging in activities with member associations that endorse ballot measures – **FAILED**.

- **SB 2039**: Property tax exemption for ag storage facilities – **PASSED**.

There is still a lot of important work to do! For bills that have crossed over, this is the last chance to weigh in to make changes or encourage their passage or defeat. If the bills are altered by the second chamber at all, they may go to conference committees where lawmakers from both sides will work on a compromise.

Make sure you are subscribed to the ND Counties Legislative Blog to receive weekly reports, updates and timely alerts on county-related bills. Go to: www.ndcounties.blog.



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Law Enforcement Shows Their Skills at Vision Zero Free Throw Contest

By Molly Schoen

Vision Zero held their first law enforcement officer's (LEOs) and Free Throws contest during halftime at the University of Jamestown's men's basketball game on December 13. The spotlight briefly shifted from athletes to our community's LEOs for the contest. This exciting event brought together three local LEOs for a friendly yet competitive showdown on the court, with a mission beyond basketball.

The contest not only highlighted the impressive skills of our local officers but also underscored their critical role in supporting Vision Zero's mission to reduce serious injuries and traffic deaths caused by motor vehicle crashes. Events like this remind us of the incredible work done by these individuals to keep our roads and neighborhoods safe to help reach the Vision Zero goal.

First up was Trooper Casey Fetch from the North Dakota Highway Patrol (NDHP). The crowd erupted with cheers as Trooper Fetch showcased his skills under pressure, setting the tone for the night. Next, Reserve Deputy Jason Vogel from the Stutsman County Sheriff's Office stepped up to the line. With precision and focus, Deputy Vogel aimed for the hoop, delivering an impressive performance. Finally, representing the Jamestown Police Department, Officer Cole Woodford—who showed he was no stranger to the hardwood—ultimately took home the win, earning both the trophy and bragging rights.

The event was sponsored by Colleen Mostad of COUNTRY Financial, whose generous support added to the evening's excitement. The cheers and camaraderie



"LEOs and Free Throws was planned to provide some entertainment for the halftime crowd, a friendly competition for the agencies, and to serve as a reminder of the importance of community support for our law enforcement." – Leah Kelm (pictured left), Southeast Regional Outreach Coordinator for Vision Zero

throughout the contest made it clear this was more than just a game; it was a celebration of the men and women who dedicate their lives to serving our communities.

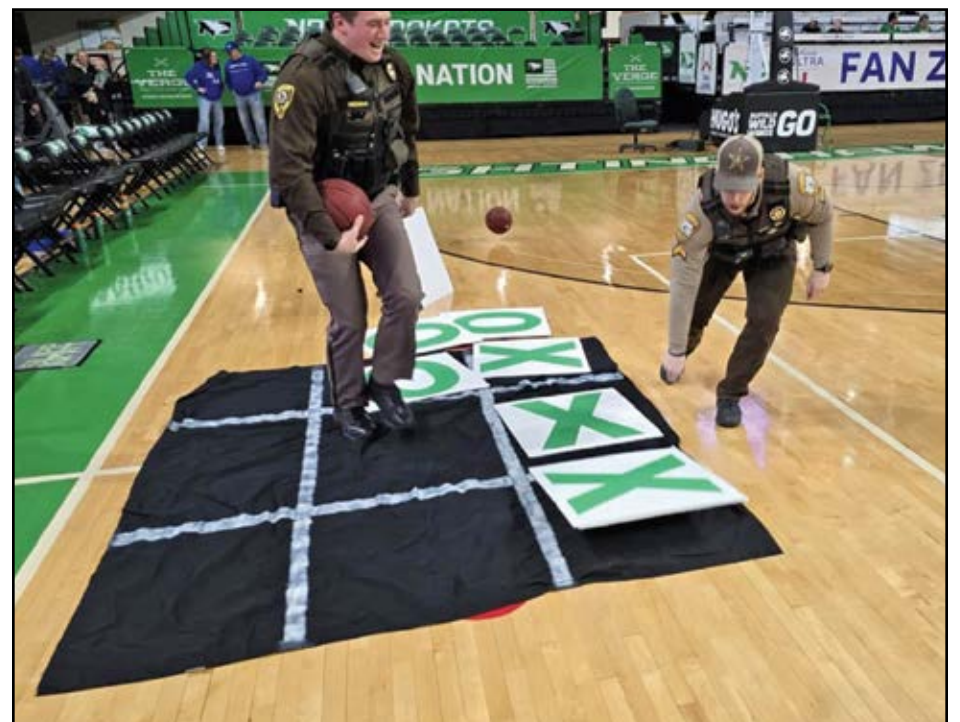
Another incredible halftime moment took place just days later. On December 17, the University of North Dakota women's basketball team hosted Mayville State University, where halftime featured four local law enforcement agencies competing in a game of Free-Throw Tic-Tac-Toe.

Representatives from the UND Police Department, Grand Forks Police Department, Grand Forks County Sheriff's Department, and NDHP took to the court in a fun and engaging competition. The officers combined strategy and precision to sink their shots and mark their spaces, all while energizing the crowd with their enthusiasm and teamwork.

This unique event was made possible thanks to the generous sponsorship of Foley Bros. Powder Coating LLC, whose

support brought the contest to life. The combination of basketball, community engagement, and gratitude for law enforcement made for an unforgettable night.

Both events showcased the strong connection between local law enforcement and the communities they serve. These officers continue to protect and support us daily, and moments like these provide a rare opportunity to celebrate their hard work in a more personal and fun setting.



Ice Cleats – A Proven Safety Device to Help Prevent Slips, Trips, And Falls

Michael Wolf | CEG Underwriting & Loss Control Manager

While it's best to wear footwear that's appropriate for the winter season, work shoes or boots don't always suffice when it comes to walking in slippery conditions. However, ice cleats can keep you safe and injury free. And best of all, you don't need to buy special winter shoes or boots for each season since you can use ice cleats on your normal shoes or boots.

By minimizing the chance of slipping, ice cleats have proven to be significantly effective in reducing the number of slips, falls and injuries when worn in work settings where the outdoors introduce dangerous and slippery terrain.

Moreover, many county working conditions include frequent transitioning from outdoors to indoors or in and out of vehicles. While ice cleats are incredibly effective in helping you get a grip outdoors, they pose challenges to workers who shift between indoor and outdoor settings where concrete and indoor surfaces can be equally slick.

Most outdoor North Dakota work environments demand heavy-duty traction due to ever present ice and snow. This requires an ice cleat that has durable molded-in spikes that are strategically placed to maximize



traction. Designed to penetrate ice and snow, studs are very aggressive; but they can become a serious slip hazard when walking indoors. It is imperative that you NEVER wear ice cleats when indoors!

That's why the County Employer Group (CEG) only recommends ice cleats that allow the user to rotate the traction aid out of the way to transition indoors or while driving and rotate back to the "on" position when needed for outdoors. This type of ice cleats is convenient in that they never have to be removed from the footwear. Using a mid-sole style ice cleat rotated to an "off" position allows for a quick and easy transition to driving or indoors. High, low, and slim profiles are also available

and are designed to fit a variety of boots and shoes, no matter what the shoe size.

Mid-sole ice cleats encourage users to actually use them because of the convenience of not having to be removed between going indoors and outdoors. Improved traction allows for more confident movement on slippery surfaces, reducing anxiety about a potential fall.

Ice cleats are also great for everyday personal use, whether it is running errands or other winter activity use such as walking or ice fishing. Seniors are at a higher risk of falls, so ice cleats can provide extra protection during the winter months.

Just because you may be wearing ice cleats, it doesn't mean they protect you 100%. You still need to be conscious of the conditions and environments you are exposed to and always be sure to take every precaution to keep yourself safe when walking in icy and snowy conditions!

The popularity of utilizing ice cleats in county government continues to grow. County employees in road

departments, maintenance, social services, law enforcement, emergency services, and courthouse employees coming in and out of work are experiencing the benefits of using ice cleats. Through the CEG's Safety and Ergonomic Grant over the past several years, we have put over 1,500 pairs of ice cleats into the hands of county employees at no charge to the county.

Would you like a pair of ice cleats? I will send a free pair of ice cleats to the first five people who read this article and send an email to michael.casey@ndaco.org.

The utilization of ice cleats is just another proactive way for the CEG to assist counties in helping keep their employees safe and injury free. Ice cleats are very affordable and a great investment in helping keep your employees safe. The CEG is ready and available to help keep your employees safe. Contact us if you are interested in providing these vital safety devices to your employees.

**Remember to
Work Smart ~ Work Safe**



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NDLTAP Recognizes 2024 Road Scholars

The North Dakota Local Technical Assistance Program (NDLTAP) offers a Road Scholar Program for road and highway practitioners in North Dakota. It recognizes each participant's achievement in subjects and topics essential to efficient and effective local road maintenance and management.

The participation in the Road Scholar Program will increase the knowledge and awareness of how and why the road systems must be properly managed. The ideas, knowledge, and skills they gain through NDLTAP training will help them on the job, strengthen the agency, preserve the roadway infrastructure, and reduce the cost of maintaining the roadways.

The NDLTAP Program Consists of 3 levels of completion:

Trail Blazer (Level 1) – 30 Learning Hours

Voyager (Level 2) – 90 Learning Hours

Road Pro (Level 3) – 150 Learning Hours

This year NDLTAP awarded 24 Trail Blazer (Level 1) recipients and 2 Voyager (Level 2) recipients.

These awards are presented at the ND Association of County Engineers Annual County Roads Conference.



Back row: Terry Schwanzenberger, Andrew McLeish, Michael Schwartz, Shane Olauson, Jason Metcalf, Brandon Schartz, Bernie Hedstrom, Ron Sveum. Front row: Dave Calihou, Dan Grosz, Robert Giese, Mark Allery.



2024 Road Scholar Award Recipients

2024 Trail Blazer Level 1



- Mark Allery - Rolette County
- Jeremy Buchmann - City of Beulah
- Shane Olauson - Barnes County
- Shayne Saylor - McKenzie County
- Brandon Schantz - Morton County
- Michael Schwartz - Dunn County
- Wade Sharbono - City of Devils Lake
- Abraham Starck - City of Bismarck
- Ron Sveum - Ransom County
- Jason Tangsrud - Bottineau County
- Timothy Tveiten - City of West Fargo
- Ryan Van Dyke - Cass County
- Daniel Veum - Walsh County
- Michael Wickenheiser - Emmons County
- Cody Wiedrich - Mercer County
- Dave Calihou - Dunn County
- Pete Finck - City of Mandan
- Robert Giese - Sheridan County
- Dan Grosz - Dunn County
- Alex Hagle - City of West Fargo
- Shawn Hanson - City of West Fargo
- Bernie Hedstrom - Burleigh County
- Jason Metcalf - Barnes County
- Logan Misialek - Walsh County

2024 Voyager Level 2



- Andrew McLeish - Dunn County
- Terry Schwanzenberger - Dunn County

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

Incidentally, so do we.



There is no B-Team.



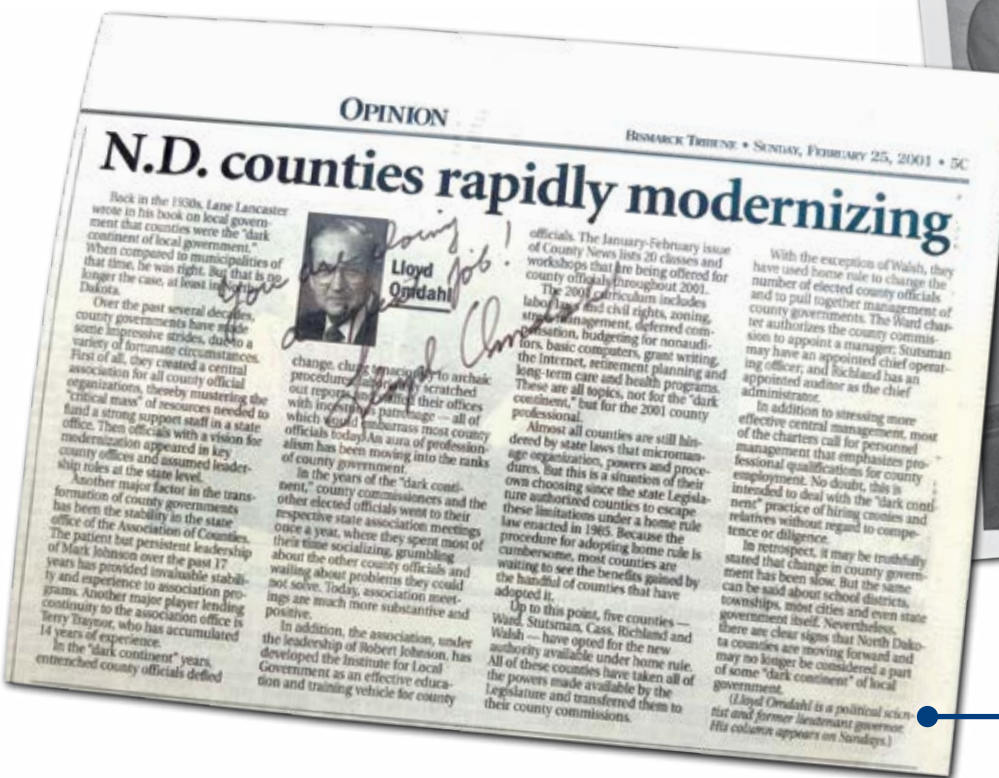
Random Finds From The Archive

Signing of State Aid Distribution 1989 Session

Back L-R: Robert Johnson, NDLC Executive Director; Darald Berg, NDLC President; Richard Bendish, NDACo Lobbyist; Mark Johnson, NDACo Executive Director; Rep Richard Kloubec, Senator Bill Heigaard. Front L-R: Lloyd Stromme, NDCCA President; Governor George Sinner; Ernie Fadness, NDACo President.



Autographed opinion piece praising counties' early adoption of technology.



Background on NDACo

Author unknown, written early 1990s

Prior to the formation of the North Dakota Association of Counties, county representation in legislative matters was up to the initiative of individual counties. In 1972, the lack of organization became so apparent that some commissioners were literally told to go home and get their act together.

That year the North Dakota County Commissioners Association voted to research the possibility of forming an association that would include all elected county officials. About 700 letters were mailed out asking for commitments to the new organization. Response was good.

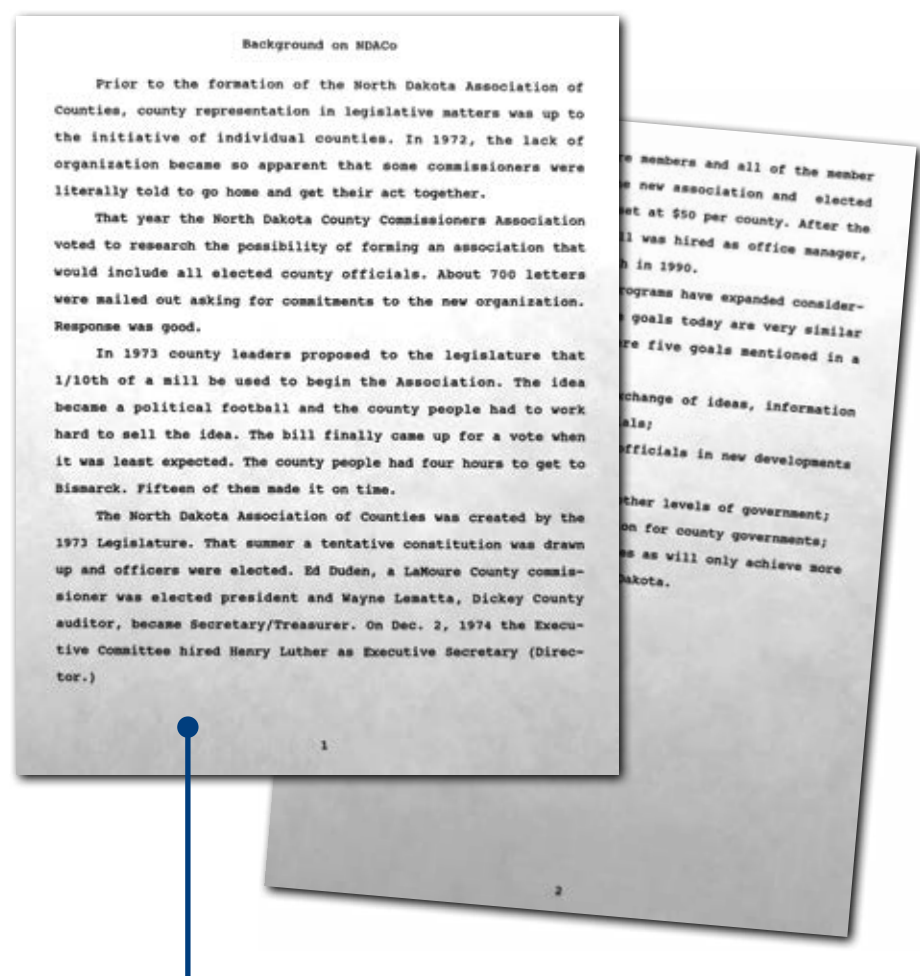
In 1973 county leaders proposed to the legislature that 1/10th of a mill be used to begin the Association. The idea became a political football and the county people had to work hard to sell the idea. The bill finally came up for a vote when it was least expected. The county people had four hours to get to Bismarck. Fifteen of them made it on time.

The North Dakota Association of Counties was created by the 1973 Legislature. That summer a tentative constitution was drawn up and officers were elected. Ed Duden, a LaMoure County commissioner was elected president and Wayne Lematta, Dickey County auditor, became Secretary/Treasurer. On Dec. 2, 1974 the Executive Committee hired Henry Luther as Executive Secretary (Director.)

By 1975, all 53 counties were members and all of the member associations voted to support the new association and elected representatives. Early dues were set at \$50 per county. After the 1975 Legislative Session, Lynn Will was hired as office manager, a position she held until her death in 1990.

Although NDACo services and programs have expanded considerably since 1973, surprisingly, the goals today are very similar to those first set down. There were five goals mentioned in a 1974 communication with members:

1. Provide for a medium for exchange of ideas, information and experiences of all county officials;
2. Promote training of county officials in new developments in their fields of endeavor;
3. Facilitate cooperation with other levels of government;
4. Propose and support legislation for county governments;
5. Engage in such other activities as will only achieve more effective county government in North Dakota.





Where Are They Now

Ann Estvold | NDACo Communications Intern

A new feature for County News profiles past scholarship winners

Brett Mortenson, son of Roughrider North Service Zone Director Diane Mortenson, received the scholarship in 2017. He graduated from the University of Mary in 2018 as a Social Work major.

“Having my mom in such an important role helped me to realize just how needed people in the helping professions are. Social issues will always exist. To be able to address and respond to certain social issues that she was responsible for certainly inspired me to pursue a career in the helping professions,” said Brett.

Brett now works as an intake lead and administrator for Adult Protective Services, which is administered through the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services.

“Though I am not required to have a degree in social work in my current job, it certainly has helped me navigate working with the vulnerable population in our state.”

Brett spends most of his time with his family, busy with his two-year-old son and three-month-old daughter. When he does get free time, Brett likes to



Brett Mortenson and family.

enjoy the outdoors with family and spend summer weekends camping and fishing at Lake Sakakawea. He also enjoys hunting, golfing and staying involved in his church.

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

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

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



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

Miranda Kleven, PE, AE2S Special Projects Engineer



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NDACo Legislative Wrap-Up Report Webinar

TENTATIVELY
Wednesday, May 14
10am - 12pm, CT

Registration opens in April!

Learn about legislation that will impact counties!

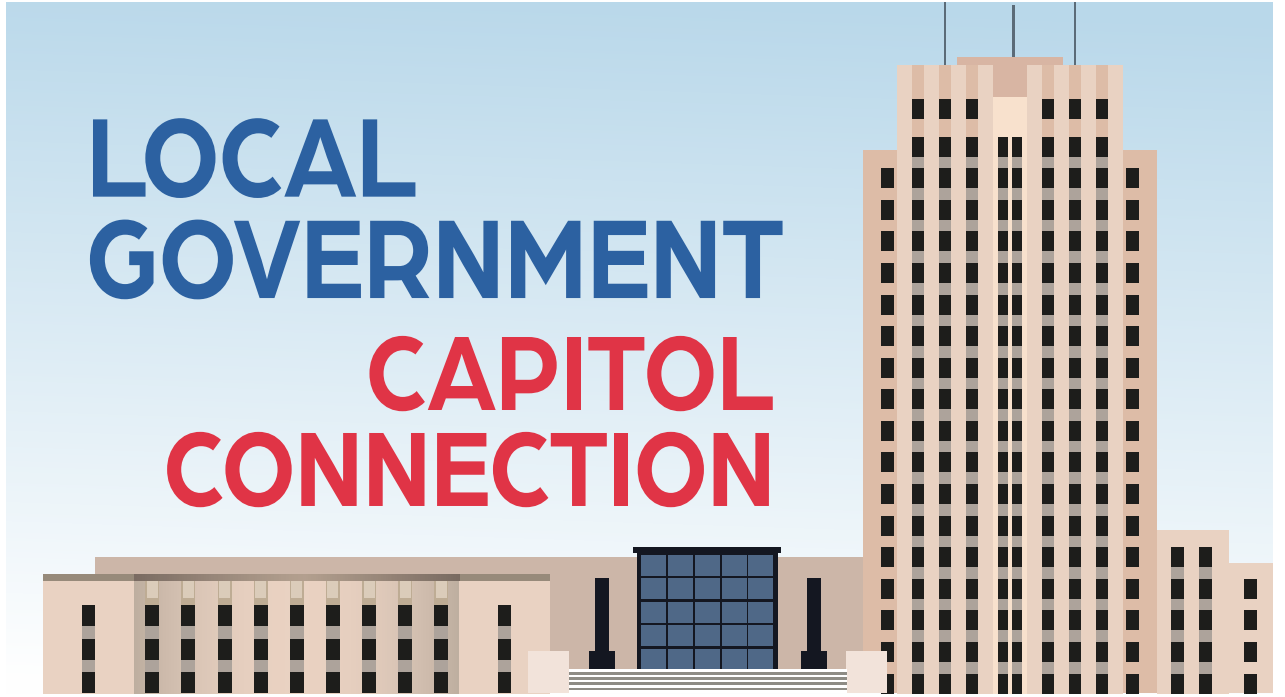


Attendees earn 2 ILG professional development training hours!





NDACo Executive Director Aaron Birst spoke on county legislative priorities.



NDACo Government/Public Relations Specialist Donnell Preskey moderated a legislative panel on property taxes.



ND Township Officers Association Executive Director Larry Syverson reviews legislative priorities of the townships.





Health Groups Host Public Health Day for Legislators

Mary Korsmo | NDSACCHO Executive Director

The ND State Association of City and County Health Officials (SACCHO) members teamed up with the North Dakota Public Health Association (NDPHA) and the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services (NDHHS) partners for Public Health Day at the Legislature on February 13th.

Held in the Capitol's Memorial and Legislative Halls, the event showcased

public health initiatives and the work public health professionals do to protect and improve the health of North Dakota communities. Public health trivia and Plinko were among the activities enjoyed by Legislators.

In addition to many legislators, the Governor also stopped by as did some of his staff – Chief Operating Officer Al Dohrmann and General Counsel Chris Joseph.



Sen. Judy Lee visits Public Health Day.



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Agencies Encouraged to Apply for State Clean Diesel Grant Awards

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality (NDDEQ) is pleased to release the FY2024 State Clean Diesel Grant Program application. Schools, cities, counties, and other government agencies that require larger, heavy-duty vehicles are encouraged to apply for State Clean Diesel Grant awards.

The NDDEQ will issue approximately \$380,000 in awards funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to purchase new or newer, diesel-powered, zero-emission, hybrid, or alternatively fueled vehicles. The purpose of the funding is to reduce diesel emissions in accordance with the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act of the

Energy Policy Act of 2010. To date, 127 older vehicles in North Dakota have been replaced using this funding, with a reduction in air emissions of about 225 tons over the lifetime of those vehicles.

The application and program guidelines are available at <https://deq.nd.gov/AQ/planning/CleanDiesel.aspx>. Applications can be mailed to the North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality, Division of Air Quality, 4201 Normandy Street, 2nd Floor, Bismarck, ND 58503-1324 or emailed to airquality@nd.gov. Applications must be received by 5 p.m. CT on Mar. 31, 2025.

Grant to Support Data Flow Between Jails, Medicaid

ND Health and Human Services (NDHHS) Medicaid program was recently awarded a federal grant to support building data connections between jails and Medicaid. NDHHS was awarded a total of \$5 million to use by Dec. 31, 2028. The primary use of the funds will be to subgrant to jails to fund IT system enhancements to enable

bidirectional data sharing. There are no state/county matching dollars required.

NDHHS Medicaid staff will be reaching out to jails to establish points of contact and start to gather information. Questions about the grant may be directed to Krista Fremming at krfremming@nd.gov.

Purchasing Pulse Cooperative Purchasing Legislation for Park Boards

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

Legislation has been introduced to expand the cooperative purchasing authority of park districts. Park districts already have authority to purchase from Office of Management and Budget (OMB) cooperative state contracts in lieu of conducting a competitive process (North Dakota Century Code chapter 40-49). This session, House Bill 1198 was introduced which will give park districts authority to enter into cooperative purchasing contracts with other states and thru joint powers agreements which will benefit park districts.

The needs of park and recreation entities are different than most government entities—with an element of fun! Park districts need lawn and grounds maintenance equipment, playground equipment, sports

equipment and supplies for golf courses, baseball diamonds, bike trails, picnic areas, swimming pools, and ice rinks.

Expanding cooperative purchasing is a top priority for OMB in 2025, and OMB looks forward to collaborating with the North Dakota Association of Counties, North Dakota League of Cities, North Dakota Recreation and Park Association, and North Dakota School Boards Association to identify and create more cooperative purchasing contracts that benefit local government.

Visit the OMB website at www.omb.nd.gov for more information about cooperative purchasing contracts and State Surplus Property. If you have questions, please contact the State Procurement Office at infospo@nd.gov.

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NDSU Extension 4-H Youth Development Initiative Awarded \$250,000 CHS Foundation Grant

The Award Will Finance A North Dakota 4-H Initiative Designed To Prepare Youth For Their Futures

NDSU Extension's Center for 4-H Youth Development announced that the Next Chapter at NDSU initiative has been selected to receive a \$250,000 grant from the CHS Foundation. Only one program per college is eligible to compete for the award.

The Next Chapter at NDSU initiative is a career readiness curriculum for youth as young as eighth grade. Through hands-on activities, participants explore their passions, develop critical life skills and map out pathways toward postgraduation goals.

The curriculum features 17 adaptable and updated lesson plans. Topics include goal-setting, time management, resume writing and financial management. Delivered in the classroom, after school and in 4-H club settings, the program prepares youth to succeed in their future careers and lives.

"This recognition highlights our and the CHS Foundation's unwavering commitment to empowering youth and cultivating the next generation of agricultural leaders," says Leigh Ann Skurupey, assistant director of 4-H Youth Development.

The Next Chapter at NDSU initiative is a response to a national survey of high schoolers indicating they do not feel prepared for a job after graduation and want an educational pathway that is shorter, more affordable and connected to a career.


A feature of the Next Chapter at NDSU initiative is the Careers in a Box resource. Designed to expand program reach and enhance youth development, Careers in a Box introduces participants to career-focused activities that provide real-world experiences. The initiative also helps connect youth and professionals to foster networking and mentorship. The CHS Foundation Grant will help build out more of these packaged programs.

"The CHS Foundation is proud to support North Dakota 4-H and its Next Chapter at NDSU program," says Megan Wolle, CHS Foundation president. "This work is both creative and grounded in research for youth development. We're grateful for the strong program leadership that will help develop the next generation of agriculture leaders in North Dakota."

In 2023, CHS was recognized as the NDSU Foundation Partner in Excellence. CHS's past contributions include the CHS Endowed Chair in Risk Management and Trading in 2015, a grant to support NDSU's precision agriculture program in 2022 and 10 annual CHS Foundation Scholarships for students pursuing a degree in the NDSU College of Agriculture, Food Systems and Natural Resources.



The Next Chapter at NDSU initiative is a career readiness curriculum designed to help youth succeed in their postgraduation endeavors. (NDSU photo)



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

With a moratorium currently in place, **Mountrail** County continues work on ordinances related to data centers and battery energy storage systems. The Mountrail County Land Development Code Committee held their first meeting on Tuesday, Nov. 19, working on how to move forward with a conditional use policy that will address the concerns along with the possibility of that type of development. An initial draft meeting was held on Tuesday, Feb. 4, the next step in the process. Scott Harmstead of SRF Consulting was there to present the initial draft regarding the data centers. The draft included the definition, purpose and uses for data centers, as well as recommendations for submittal requirements for those seeking to put a data center in Mountrail County.

– *Mountrail County Promoter*

At the **Grant** County Commission meeting on January 8, 2025, commissioners discussed the applications for the Energy Efficiency Community Block Grant (EECBG), which was opened by the North Dakota Department of Commerce on November 1, 2024. “This program offers \$1.6 million in grant funding to support energy efficiency projects in North Dakota’s smaller communities and counties,” according to the Department of Commerce.

Qualifying projects include:

- Upgrading Public Buildings: From weatherization to energy-efficient heating and cooling systems.
- Street and Signal Light Replacements: Switching to LED lights.
- EV Charging Stations: Installing stations in accessible areas for your community.

Funding up to \$65,000 is available per project, with a 20% match requirement. This grant comes at a key moment for the county, as the shaft for the air handler in the county courthouse needs replacing. Matthew Hills with HA Thompson & Sons met with the commissioners on January 8 to discuss their options to temporarily fix the shaft or replace the air handler. The shaft on the air handler in the courthouse is no longer made but shafts can be custom made. A custom-made shaft would be considered a band-aid fix for the 40–45-year-old unit and can still be costly. Hills recommended to the board replacing the entire unit, as it would be more financially sufficient. The commissioners agreed to pursue the EECBG in hopes it would help with the cost of the air handler.

– *Grant County News*

Back in December of 2022, **Eddy** County commissioners carried a motion to demolish the historic Hanson Bridge, which has connected New Rockford to the northern bank of the James River since 1904. However, more than two years later

the picturesque bridge still stands, and now there’s an opportunity for someone to save the historic structure via adoption. The bridge – which connects 6th Street North to River Drive – has been closed to both vehicle and pedestrian traffic for decades due to its poor condition, and it has continued to deteriorate without regular maintenance. When the bridge was last inspected in 2019, the deck and substructure were rated in poor condition, while the superstructure was rated in serious condition. But that hasn’t stopped everyone from ignoring the signs and occasionally crossing the bridge. A little over two years ago, commissioners expressed a desire to take care of the bridge before it collapses, recognizing it as a safety hazard. When commissioners carried that motion in 2022 to have the bridge removed, they weren’t aware of its place on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The NRHP is part of the National Park Service, and is the official list of the nation’s historic places deemed “worthy of preservation.” The bridge’s origin dates back to a bid placed by county commissioners in June of 1904, which asked for a “steel bridge across James River at New Rockford.” Built more than 120 years ago, it is currently one of four structures in Eddy County listed on the NRHP, having been entered into the register as “New Rockford Bridge,” on March 13, 1997. And because of its place on the NRHP, the bridge must be made available for adoption before any effort to remove it takes place. “Eddy County and the North Dakota Department of Transportation is announcing that the bridge is currently available for adoption during a 30-day advertisement period ending February 14, 2025,” states a public notice published in this week’s edition of the Transcript.

– *New Rockford Transcript*

The president of the **Trail** County Historical Society unveiled preliminary plans recently for a birthday bash celebrating the county’s 150th anniversary. John Wright presented Trail County commissioners with a list of options spelling out how residents could come together in June to commemorate the founding of the county in 1875. “We were thinking we should do something for the 150th (anniversary) but we need to start doing the planning soon,” Wright said during his opening remarks Tuesday. Wright proposed the county set up a five-person committee, led by himself and County Auditor Glenda Haugen, to begin making plans for an anniversary celebration that would be held in June. Suggestions for recognizing the county reaching its 150-year milestone included:

- Holding an open house at the Trail County Courthouse building in Hillsboro on the Friday or Saturday during the Hillsboro Days celebration in June.

- Putting together a float, commemorating the county’s 150th birthday, to appear in the Hillsboro Days parade, the Fourth of July parade in Hatton and the Farmers Bowl parade in Mayville in September.
- Working with the Hillsboro Banner to create a special section insert that would appear in the paper in June looking back on the history of Trail County.
- Coordinating a bus tour of important places in the county’s history, including to Caledonia, about 13 miles northeast of Hillsboro, where the county seat originated before being relocated to Hillsboro.
- Ordering shirts for county employees and having a professional photo taken of the group. A similar photo was taken for the county’s 125th anniversary, Wright said. The costs of the shirts could be covered by individual county offices from their departmental budgets, Haugen said. She estimated the county would need to spend \$3,000 to cover the other events and ideas. County Board Chairman Tom Eblen appointed County Commissioner Larry Young to serve on the five-member anniversary committee.

– *Hillsboro Banner*

After deliberating for about an hour, the **Walsh** County Commission voted unanimously to move forward with the \$42 million jail construction project. The next step will be to finalize ballot language for the mill increase and countywide sales tax increase. Last Tuesday, Jan. 21, the Walsh County Commission heard a presentation unveiling the plan for the new jail by the Samuels Group, understanding it was a lot to take in. The project would totally revamp the 600 Block of Cooper Avenue in Grafton and would include demolition of the existing Law Enforcement Center and the new jail would be attached to the existing Walsh County Courthouse. Walsh County Commission Chairman Kristi Brintnell opened the meeting by stating the purpose of the meeting and asking anyone if they had any questions. In its proposal, The Samuel Group and Elevatus Architecture designed the jail with 48 beds. Samuels said they hired Tom Buckner of Weber Associates; his job is to go around the United States and look at various counties to come up with counts and review operations. “He worked with the jail administration, looked at all your guys’ records, looked at what was coming in for bookings and putting all that information together, came up with the 48 beds.” Currently the state limits the

number of prisoners in the Walsh County Law Enforcement Center (WCLEC) to 16. In the recent past the facility has held up to 23-24 prisoners and in the 70s and 80s they claimed there were as many as 40 inmates in the jail at one time.

– *Walsh County Record*

Heavy equipment dispatched to Bordulac in the wake of the train derailment incident on July 5, 2024, went a long way in helping to keep the event from becoming truly catastrophic. However, the weight of the semis, blades, water trucks and other vehicles traveling to and from the scene has caused significant damage to two **Foster** County roadways. At a special meeting of the Board of Commissioners Monday morning, Jan. 27, the board, along with Road Foreman Nate Monson and County Engineer Mike Rivinius of Wold Engineering, met with a representative of Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC) Railroad to discuss the county’s request for reimbursement from the railway to cover the cost of road repair. Commissioner David Utke said the county is seeking a total of \$4.2 million from CPKC, of which \$3.9 million of that total would go toward fixing the Bordulac Road (County Road 1613 or 74th Avenue NE south of ND Highway 200), and \$300,000 for the Murphy Highway (County Road 1614 or 1st Street SE). Costs were calculated in an estimate provided to the commission by Wold Engineering in August. The money would be used to pave a three-inch overlay on the Bordulac Road and for patch-up work on the Murphy Highway.

– *Foster County Independent*

The **Cass** County Sheriff’s Office is starting a Sheriff’s Quick Response Team (SQRT). There are 10 deputies assigned to the SQRT. These deputies will receive additional monthly training and equipment to better prepare them to respond to multi-location coordinated attacks, mass casualty events, active shooters, barricaded subjects, hostage rescue, and high-risk incident planning. The SQRT is being formed to increase response times in high-risk situations and to be progressive in our training, keeping the Sheriff’s Office at the forefront of providing public safety to our communities. Our goal is to have the SQRT fully operational within the next two months. The SQRT will be responsible for planning and attending significant gathering events this summer involving our Office. We are aware larger cities have started to transition to this type of response in the wake of recent large event gatherings and violent tragedies. It will always remain the mission and vision of the Cass County Sheriff’s Office to be progressive in our approach to providing a high level of public safety to our citizens.

– *Cass County News Release*

North Dakota Attorney General's Opinions

These and all other Opinions issued by the ND Attorney General's Office can be seen at:

<https://attorneygeneral.nd.gov/opinions-search/>.

WHETHER THE TECHNICAL DISPUTE REVIEW BOARD IS SUBJECT TO OPEN MEETINGS LAW

Opinion #: 2025-O-02

Date issued: January 10, 2025

Issued to: Metro Flood Diversion Authority Board

Request: Whether the Technical Dispute Review Board is subject to open meetings law.

Conclusion: The Technical Dispute Review Board is a committee of the Metro Flood Diversion Authority; therefore, the Metro Flood Diversion Authority violated N.D.C.C. §44-04-20 when it failed to notice the Technical Dispute Review Board's special meetings.

WHETHER THE HARRISON TOWNSHIP FAILED TO RESPOND TO A RECORDS REQUEST WITHIN A REASONABLE TIME

A new Attorney General's Open Meetings Opinion has been issued:

Opinion #: 2025-O-04

Date issued: March 6, 2025

Issued to: Harrison Township

Request: Whether the Harrison Township failed to respond to a records request within a reasonable time.

Conclusion: The Harrison Township did not properly respond to a request for records when it failed to justify a six-week delay in providing records for a first request and over a month delay for a second request.

CITY OF MANDAN

A new Attorney General's Open Records Opinion has been issued:

Opinion #: 2025-O-08

Date issued: March 7, 2025

Issued to: City of Mandan

Request: Whether the city of Mandan responded to a records request in a reasonable time.

Conclusion: The City of Mandan did not respond to a records request for over two months. The unintentional delay in responding to the records request was unreasonable.

MILNOR PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 2

A new Attorney General's Open Records Opinion has been issued:

Opinion #: 2025-O-07

Date issued: March 7, 2025

Issued to: Milnor Public School District No. 2

Request: Whether the fees charged by the Milnor Public School District No. 2 in responding to an open record request were in violation of N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18.

Conclusion: The Milnor Public School District No. 2 violated N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by charging fees for mileage costs, travel time, time spent conversing about the open records request, and for time spent organizing, forwarding, and saving records into a OneDrive folder, and by failing to exclude the initial hour for locating the records.

APPLE CREEK TOWNSHIP

A new Attorney General's Open Meetings Opinion has been issued:

Opinion #: 2025-O-06

Date issued: March 7, 2025

Issued to: Apple Creek Township

Requests:

1. Whether the Apple Creek Township provided notice of its July 5, 2022, regular meeting in substantial compliance with N.D.C.C. § 44-04-20.
2. Whether the Apple Creek Township responded to a records request within a reasonable time.

Conclusions:

1. Apple Creek Township provided notice of its July 5, 2022, regular meeting in substantial compliance with N.D.C.C. § 44-04-20 when the only alleged deficiency in the notice was the Township's failure to post notice at the location of the meeting on the day of the meeting.
2. Apple Creek Township did not properly respond to a request for records when it failed to justify a delay of nine days to provide the newspaper publication for the 2011 annual meeting notice, 12 days to direct the requester to the Township's website for minutes, five weeks to provide a single audio recording, and nearly seven weeks to produce a handful of emails.

Horning Recognized

Continued from page 1

that the industry relies on to continue the advancement of NG9-1-1 nationwide, including the NASNA working group that filed the NASNA 21-479 Facilitating NG9-1-1 petition.

"Kathy Kottenbrock (NDACo 9-1-1 Project Manager) and I couldn't do what we do without the trust and confidence of our membership," Horning said. "I appreciate everyone's help to build and maintain positive relationships with the counties."

Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Representative Gabe Evans (R-CO), and FCC Chairman Brendan Carr were the featured speakers for the awards event. The NG9-1-1 Institute is a national not-for-profit organization that works with the Congressional NextGen 9-1-1 Caucus to promote deployment of advanced and effective 9-1-1 and Next Generation 9-1-1 services throughout the nation.

Congratulations to Jason Horning!

HHS Seeks Public Comment on Five-Year Renewal to North Dakota's Medicaid 1915(i)

ND Health and Human Services (HHS) is seeking public comment on a five-year renewal to the state's Medicaid 1915(i) State Plan Amendment. The amendment allows Medicaid to pay for additional in-home and community-based services for qualifying children and adults with mental health conditions, substance use disorders and/or brain injuries. Comments will be accepted through March 28 at noon CT.

As part of the renewal, HHS is proposing language updates to align with behavioral health best practices and implementing improved quality measurements that support Medicaid's overall quality improvement strategy. There are no proposed changes to Medicaid 1915(i) general provider policies.

"The Medicaid 1915(i) program provides a pathway for qualifying Medicaid members with behavioral health needs to access in-home and community-based services and supports closer to home. This aligns with our agency's strategic priorities," said Sarah Aker, HHS Medical Services Division director.

In January 2025, nearly 900 individuals

received Medicaid 1915(i) services including housing, educational and employment supports; community transition services; peer support; care coordination; respite care; and other supportive services. There are nearly 500 individual and agency providers enrolled to provide Medicaid 1915(i) services. The draft five-year renewal is available online at //hhs.nd.gov/1915i.

Submitting Comments

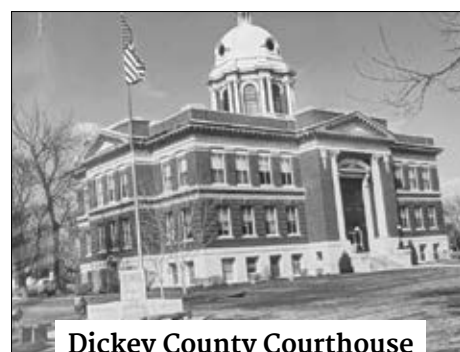
Individuals can submit comments by emailing stanleycody@nd.gov, or calling 701-239-8987, or 711 (TTY) or by fax at 701-328-1544. Comments can also be mailed to NDHHS Medical Services Division, Attn: Cody Stanley, 600 E. Blvd. Ave., Dept. 325, Bismarck, ND, 58505-0250.

After the public comment period ends, the Medicaid 1915(i) State Plan Amendment five-year renewal will be submitted to the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services State Plan Amendment (CMS) for review and approval. The Medicaid 1915(i) State Plan Amendment is expected to be effective Oct. 1, 2025.

Oops!

In the January-February edition of *County News*, we featured a photo from an old scrapbook and mistakenly identified the Dickey County Courthouse as the Divide County Courthouse.

A big thanks to Dickey County Commissioner Jerry Walsh and others for catching that!



Dickey County Courthouse



Divide County Courthouse

Work delay due to hitting a pipeline while digging

4½ days

Time it takes to call 811 before you dig

4½ minutes

—

Would you rather your time is saved or wasted? The fact is, you put a lot of time, thought, and effort into making every job perfect. But when you skip calling 811, you run the risk of hitting a pipeline or another underground infrastructure, placing your life in serious danger. Don't take shortcuts.

Call 811 before any digging project.

Visit enbridge.com/call811 for more information.



Benefits of Continuing to Work in Retirement

Historically, retirement meant a time when most people stopped working

Today, that's not necessarily true. A recent study¹ of current workers found that:

- **57%** — Plan to work full- or part-time after they retire
- **17%** — Are unsure if they will work after they retire
- **26%** — Do not plan to work after they retire

As more people retire early and live longer, some may continue working for a variety of reasons.

To decide if being a working retiree makes sense for you, consider these lifestyle and financial benefits.

Boost Your Health

A job can keep you active physically, mentally and socially. Exercising your body and mind promotes good health. So does feeling connected to others.

Stay Involved Locally

A job that gets you out and about in your local area can give you a sense of belonging. It can also provide a sense of purpose as you help others through your work.

Support A Cause

You might shift gears to work with an organization that shares your commitment to a cause. From food pantries to animal shelters, non-profits need volunteers and paid help.

Continue Enjoying Work

If you love your career, age is no reason to quit. Whether you stay in



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Delay Taking

Social Security Benefits

The longer you wait to collect Social Security, the larger your monthly check will be. Your benefit amount increases each year between ages 62 and 70. Working in retirement can help you wait to take Social Security until you're older.

Put Off Dipping Into

Your Retirement Accounts

Remaining employed can give your investments more time to grow. You may also be able to take advantage of catch-up contributions to help you reach your goals.

Can I Work After I Start

Receiving Retirement Benefits?

The answer is "yes." Keep in mind, however, that full-time work may prohibit you from drawing a pension if it's provided by the same employer. The income could also affect your Social Security benefits if you're younger than full retirement age and earn over a certain amount. See "Receiving Benefits While Working," a guide by the Social Security Administration at www.ssa.gov/benefits/retirement/planner/whileworking.html.

your current role or find a similar one, taking on new challenges will help you continue to grow.

spending. That could mean enjoying dinners out or traveling more frequently.

Find Balance

Switching to a part-time role may provide better work-life balance. Reduced-hour options vary widely, from consulting to retail work.

Access Health

Insurance Benefits



If you retire before you qualify for Medicare, a job might offer lower-cost health benefits than private insurance provides. (Part-time work may not include benefits and full-time work may limit access to a pension. Rules vary, so ask employers.)

Supplement Your Savings

Working during retirement may give you extra money for discretionary



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A.I. Tech Tip

Jeff Eslinger | County News Editor

I keep reading how much I'm missing out on if I don't use Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) to help me with repetitive tasks, data management and generating content. The problem is, I don't have many repetitive tasks or work much with data. And generating content is MY job. I actually enjoy it.

While working on this issue of the *County News*, I received a newsletter that included some text in a graphic (see list of Road Scholar Award Winners on page 10). The list was in a nicely designed, embedded graphic. Unfortunately, it didn't work well with our column width. I did NOT want to re-type a long list. I've had success converting photo to text with my phone and with several Adobe products. So, I went with what I knew.

Unfortunately, I spent more time trying and failing than it would have

taken me to type the list. Then I remembered A.I.

I opened ChatGPT (<https://chatgpt.com/>) and ASKED IT if it could read text from photos. It answered yes, so I dragged the photo (a jpg file) onto the page and instructed it to read the text and arrange it in a single column.

In about a second and a half, it spit out the names and counties or cities of all the award winners, under the correct headlines. I reviewed it and found one error, told GPT about the error, and it spit out a new corrected list (not that it had to).

I don't know how often you need to re-type something, but next time you do, just take a picture and upload it to ChatGPT. It seemed quite happy to have helped me:

Windows 10

What Happens When Windows 10 Support Ends?

Amber Schriock | NRG Service Manager

In 2014, Microsoft announced the Windows 10 operating system to replace Windows 8.1 and be the last "version" of Windows, meaning they would continually build and improve upon it instead of a major overhaul. In 2021, Microsoft made another announcement for Windows 11, replacing Windows 10. This new operating system has different hardware requirements than its predecessor, requiring users and businesses to purchase new equipment.

Microsoft has continued to provide critical updates, such as security patches,

for Windows 10 with an end date of October 14, 2025. What does this mean for businesses? No more software updates, technical assistance or security fixes.

It's time to either migrate to Windows 11 or replace your aging hardware. Sure, your systems may continue to function, but they will be vulnerable to security exploits without further updates. You may also notice degraded performance and compatibility with other programs.

Not sure how to make the change? Contact your IT provider for assistance.



ChatGPT



ChatGPT was able to read this, despite it being small and blurry, and delivered it in nicely formatted text. (see page 10)



NRG TECHNOLOGY STAFF



Lonny Bosch..... **President**
 Cody Anderson Systems Engineer
 Garrett Bruner..... Service Coordinator
 Dawson Dosch Field Engineer
 Dwight Driscoll..... Account Manager
 Travis Fandrich.....Field Technician
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 AJ SnyderField Technician
 Kay Ternes..... Service Coordinator
 David Weiand Systems Engineer



Over 2,000 Attend NACo Legislative Conference, Including ND Delegation

County workforce gaps, land use, intergovernmental partnerships, disaster response and preparedness, federal regulations and the future of artificial intelligence (A.I.) are just some of the many topics covered March 1-4 at NACo's 2025 Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C.

Conference attendees heard from a number of high-profile speakers including NACo President James Gore of Sonoma County, Calif.; Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), speaking on the Secure Rural Schools program; Rep. Sam Graves (R-Mo.), speaking

on transportation and infrastructure and Fred Humphries, corporate vice president of U.S. Government Affairs for Microsoft.

North Dakota was well represented at the NACo Legislative Conference.



North Dakota County Officials met with newly elected ND Representative Julie Fedorchak while in D.C.



Cass County Commissioner Tony Grindberg, Cavalier County Commissioner Stanley Dick (NACo Board Rep) and Cass County Administrator Robert Wilson (NACo Board Rep) at the NACo Legislative Conference

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2025 COUNTY CALENDAR

March

- 1-4 _____ NACo Legislative Conference, Washington DC
- 4-5 _____ ND Transportation Conference, Bismarck Event Center
- 9 _____ Daylight Savings Time Begins
- 20 _____ First Day of Spring

April

- 1-30 _____ National County Government Month
- 18 _____ Good Friday (State Holiday)
- 20 _____ Easter Sunday

May

- 8 _____ NDIRF Annual Meeting, ND Heritage Center
- 9 _____ 80th Legislative Day
- 11 _____ Mother's Day
- 14 _____ Legislative Wrap-Up, Webinar - TENTATIVE
- 14-15 _____ ND Clerks of Court Association Conference, Coteau Room, Capitol
- 21-23 _____ Western Interstate Region (WIR) Conference, Rapid City, SD
- 26 _____ Memorial Day (State Holiday)
- 28 _____ NDCCA Board Meeting, NDACo County Office Building
- 29 _____ NDACo Board Meeting, NDACo County Office Building



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