

House Bill would help support county fairgrounds

Ann Estvold, NDNA Legislative Intern

A Jamestown lawmaker noticed that his local Stutsman County Fairgrounds needed some sprucing up. After doing some checking, Rep. Mitch Ostlie, R-Jamestown, saw that his home county wasn't the only one with maintenance problems.

Ostlie is sponsoring HB1591, which would allocate \$1.5 million for grants to county agriculture fair associations for the planning, designing and construction of infrastructure projects.

Ostlie initially asked for \$3 million, but the Senate Appropriations Committee cut the sum in half. Local fair associations would also have to provide at least \$1 for every dollar of state support.

Ostlie said the idea for the bill came from visiting with

the Stutsman County Fair about infrastructure needs. Upon doing more research, he realized that Stutsman County wasn't the only one with needs.

"Fairgrounds all across North Dakota are gathering places for their communities," said Mark Landa, a board member of the Greater Grand Forks Fair. Landa said the Grand Forks fairgrounds are the third-most utilized event facility in Grand Forks, even though it is only open for part of the year. All of the fairgrounds' buildings need some repairs, Landa said.

"Improving the facilities should help these fairgrounds attract more people to their events, which should bring even more dollars to our communities and more tax dollars," said Landa.

Others who support the bill said the funds were needed to update or build new infrastructure at their own fair-

grounds. The legislation has not drawn any opposition, but its supporters say some smaller fair associations may struggle to raise the required matching funds.

Nathan Schneider, a spokesman for the Burke County Fair Association in North Dakota's northwestern corner, asked that the bill require lesser match amounts for smaller counties.

Landa said that one-third of the state's county fairs are in counties with populations with fewer than 3,000 people.

The Senate Appropriations Committee approved an amendment to allow a grant recipient to provide \$1 of matching funds from nonstate sources for every \$2 of grant funding received, with the state agriculture commissioner put in charge of distributing grants. The Senate will vote later on the bill.

Bill would eliminate Daylight Saving Time

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Legislation to eliminate Daylight Saving Time in North Dakota still has a flicker of hope in the North Dakota Senate. HB1259 would abolish DST and have the state join Arizona, Hawaii and some US territories as the only areas in the nation that do not observe Daylight Saving Time, which is in effect from the second Sunday of March to the first Sunday in November.

Rep. Roger Maki, R-Watford City, introduced an amendment during the bill's hearing in the Senate's State and Local Government Committee on Thursday. The amendment would put the Daylight Saving ban into effect only if North Dakota's neighboring states took the same step.

Supporters of the bill said that North Da-

kotans are more affected by Daylight Saving Time as many of them live in the western part of the Central Time Zone. Most of North Dakota is in the Central Time Zone; the state's southwestern corner observes Mountain time.

Opponents of the bill said it would impact tourism, retail and traveling, especially in communities near the border.

"North Dakota doesn't operate in a bubble," said Arik Spencer, chief executive officer of the Greater North Dakota Chamber.

Summer events rely on the longer nights, and if the sun sets earlier, people would leave earlier, causing revenue losses, Spencer said.

Tara Felice, a spokeswoman for the Mandan Baseball Club, said games and practices are scheduled to end around sunset in

the summertime, and if the state observed Standard time all year, the events would need to end sooner because many baseball fields do not have lights. Outdoor fall sports and after-work activities would also be affected.

If Daylight Saving Time is revoked, parts of the state would see the sunrise between 4 and 5 a.m. in the summer, opponents of the DST ban said.

"How do we get employees to go to work at that time?" asked Cole Higlin, a spokesman for the North Dakota Recreation and Park Association.

Many cities in the state have ordinances that do not allow construction before 7 a.m., and without Daylight Saving Time, there would be less time to complete those projects, said Russ Hanson, executive vice

president of the Associated General Contractors of North Dakota.

Daylight Saving Time has been advertised as an energy-saving measure and as a way to lengthen North Dakota's summer nights. However, critics say those benefits are overplayed or nonexistent, and that changing clock times twice a year is annoying.

Daylight Saving Time was instituted nationwide by Congress in 1966, but Hawaii and Arizona have opted to ignore the time change. The U.S. territories of American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands also do not observe it.

The committee did not make an immediate recommendation on the bill.

OPINION

Armstrong/Strinden: Students will thrive in phone-free schools

By Gov. Kelly Armstrong and Lt. Gov. Michelle Strinden

When we stood up this week in support of legislation to require phone-free schools in North Dakota, we approached it as giving something back to students: the freedom to learn and grow with far less distraction and stress.

As parents of a combined six children who have attended 15 different schools in several districts, we've had a front-row seat to the impacts of smartphones and social media use in schools on mental health and academic performance.

We've seen how inconsistent phone policies from school to school and classroom to classroom can create confusion and frustration for students, parents and teachers alike.

A growing body of research led by organizations such as Phone-Free Schools and social psychologist Jonathan Haidt, author of "The Anxious Generation," points to phone and social media addiction as one of the most insidious mental health issues of our time.

Consider: In the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, over 30% of North Dakota high school students reported that

their mental health was "not good" – including stress, anxiety and depression – most of the time or always during the 30 days before the survey.

Over 15% reported being electronically bullied, and 77.2% – over 3 in 4 students – reported three or more hours of screen time per day, not counting the time spent doing schoolwork on electronic devices.

Every state is grappling with this issue. Sixteen states have enacted some level of phone-free school policies, and more than two dozen states have policies under consideration. Last month, Arkansas passed a "Bell to Bell, No Cell Act" requiring public schools to enact policies banning the use of cell phones during the school day. Virginia is moving in a similar direction via executive order.

North Dakota can also lead with a bell-to-bell policy requiring students to check their phones at the door when they arrive to school and pick them up when they leave.

Doing this halfway won't do enough.

As Haidt explains, banning phones in class but allowing them during breaks between classes, recess and lunch will still interfere with attention, learning, relationships and belonging. Students can't focus on class when the

temptation and dopamine release of their smartphone is within reach. Seven hours free from the distraction of their phones will produce better academic outcomes.

How schools choose to collect and store phones during the school day will vary. We are proposing \$1.5 million to cover expenses. We want to set the baseline and give schools the tools they need to deliver learning with less distraction. This legislation offers a common starting point, not a one-size-fits-all solution.

This issue transcends red-versus-blue politics. It's about protecting student well-being and giving our students the best chance to reach their full potential.

Teachers will benefit by being able to focus more time on instruction, not distraction.

Most importantly, our students will thrive with the social and lifelong learning skills necessary to compete in an ever-changing world market.

Some North Dakota schools already have bell-to-bell phone-free policies in place, showing promising results. Studies elsewhere have found improved academic performance, mental health and a reduction in bullying.

It's time. Parents have had enough of the distraction and stress, and so have many students, even if they're too proud to admit it. We can work through the emergency contact concerns and other issues, leaning on our experience from the days before smartphones were ubiquitous in schools. Our kids are worth it.

Kelly Armstrong is the 34th governor of North Dakota. Michelle Strinden is a former school counselor and the 40th lieutenant governor of North Dakota.

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING Finley & Cooperstown, ND

Notice is hereby given that the ANNUAL MEETING of Town & Country Coop of Finley & Cooperstown, ND will be held **Tuesday, April 22nd, 2025** at the **Finley American Legion**.

Supper at 6:00pm – Business Meeting to follow .

- . Annual Audit report .
- . Election of Two (2) directors for 3-year terms.
- . Any other business to properly come before the meeting will be transacted.



By order of the Board of Directors
Tim Lyste, Secretary

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85th ANNUAL MEETING
THURSDAY, APRIL 10, 2025 | Meal 5 pm Meeting 6 pm
Alerus Center in Grand Forks

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