

Time to respect ND voters

It's time for North Dakota legislators to do what they're told.

In 2018, the state's voters decided the Constitution should be amended to establish an ethics commission. Nearly 54% of those voting approved the amendment that established guidelines for the commission and directed the Legislature to work out specific details dealing with dark money and setting some criminal and civil penalties.

It was as clear then as it is now that the Legislature didn't like being told what to do. Many of them argued against the idea prior to the 2018 election, and since then they've resisted the mandate to make the commission into an effective organization.

Their bad. To its credit, the Legislature over the years has made many good and important laws.

To its discredit, it has a history of hostility to ideas initiated by citizens.

In 2008, for example, 54% of state voters approved using much of the money from tobacco lawsuit settlements to create a tobacco prevention and control program. The money came from scoff-law tobacco companies, not from taxpayers, but legislators hated that the voters told them how to spend it. The program's success rates were very high, but as soon as they could, legislators overturned the voter mandate and grabbed the cash for their own priorities.

Another example: Just last November a poll conducted by the North Dakota News Cooperative reported 82% of adults in North Dakota were in favor

Passing Dreams

By Steve Andrist



of providing free school lunch for children. For the record, 82% in politics is huge. But it wasn't enough for legislators, who in February summarily killed proposals to allocate \$140 million to provide free lunches to K-12 students.

As the session opened in January, the Ethics Commission had been logging fast growth in its complaint caseload. Still, it had high hopes for new legislation that would clear up a backlog created by ambiguous and confusing laws enacted previously, and for adding new law and new staff to streamline its operations and make them more efficient.

A request to increase the commission's three-person staff to four was cut, as were proposals for \$50,000 for rules-implementation costs and \$32,542 for increases in work load costs.

Bolstered by opposition from Gov. Kelly Armstrong and Attorney General Drew Wrigley, legislators also said "no" to a measure that would have allowed the commission to investigate alleged wrongdoing without someone filing an official complaint, improving efficiency and potentially establishing precedents that would help guide future ethics concerns.

Meanwhile, legislators appear to be moving forward with two measures that would help them, but likely would do little for the commission. One

would require dismissal of all complaints not resolved in 180 days, and the other would exempt legislators from complaints related to their legislative votes.

By all appearances, the high hopes of the Ethics Commission will have been dashed by the time the Legislature adjourns later this month. The legislative thumb will remain a firm impediment to achieving what voters likely had expected back in 2018.

It's important to note to whom the legislators are saying "no."

The Ethics Commission is much more than three hired staff members. Its five commissioners are distinguished North Dakotans who have agreed to extend long public service careers as they work, under trying circumstances, to carry out the will of the voters.

The chair is a retired brigadier general with 34 years of service to the North Dakota Army National Guard.

The others include a businessman who spent 20 years as mayor of Williston, guiding it through unprecedented growth during the oil boom; a 20-year former president of the Spirit Lake tribal college; another retired brigadier general who worked high-level jobs under governors from both parties and has spent 40 years advising or serving on nonprofit boards; and a retired longtime district judge.

The world of ethical government can be obvious and clear-cut. It can also be tricky and nuanced. These commissioners, like North Dakota voters, deserve legislative partners, not detractors.

ND newspapers thankful for Legislature's support

On the whole, North Dakota legislators understand the importance of newspapers, and their actions during the 2025 legislative session show it.

Legislators protected the publication of county minutes in newspapers, voting down a bill that would have given the option to post them only on county websites; voted to keep highway bid notices in newspapers rather than only posting them on trade or government agency websites; restored the historic practice of spreading publication of insurance abstracts across all newspapers in the state instead of just eight; passed a postal resolution asking for better delivery service for newspapers and consumers alike; and on April 16 passed a bill that gives legal weight to ndpublicnotices.com, a website maintained by the North Dakota Newspaper Association.

Senate Bill 2069 was the first bill I testified on back on Jan. 9, and the last of the five bills passed among those we were most concerned about. The bill provides two backstops for legal notices in the rare instance a newspaper fails to publish a notice, counting a notice at ndpublicnotices.com as well as a notice on a state agency website as fulfilling legal notice -- while leaving requirements for publication of print notices in place.

Because I wrote on this topic earlier in the session, it's important to let people know what is not happening.

The state will not be devel-

Whines & Roses

By Cecile Wehrman



oping a public notice website capable of cutting newspapers out of public notice placements at some future point. It was, however, a discussion among some legislators who saw this bill as a way to take a step toward eliminating the costs of publishing notices in newspapers.

When you know there are people in government who feel notices in newspapers have no value, it can seem like your house is on fire.

But the votes on some of the bills I mentioned above show that, by and large, legislators support upholding newspapers as the vehicle for delivering public notices.

Just look at some of these tallies: House Bill 1380, the county-minutes-on-the-web bill, failed in the House 80-13; House Bill 1398, restoring the historical abstract publication process, passed in the House 86-6; SB 2069, though it had a closer vote in the Senate -- possibly due to some confusion, since we opposed it originally -- passed in the House 72-17; and Senate Bill 2062, taking highway bids out of newspapers, failed 89-4.

That feels, to me, like an incredible showing of support for the importance of public notices in newspapers.

Faith on the range: A story from calving season

Fair Range

By Sydney Glasoe Caraballo



The pregnant cow lies on her right side on a soft patch of straw in the darkness. Her perilous position takes a moment or two to register in my tired brain after waking up several minutes before my 3 a.m. alarm and looking at the camera linked to my iPhone.

Her back left leg is high in the air instead of tucked underneath her. She raises her neck and kicks in distress with her front legs, trying to gain back her balance. She cannot. She has high-sided and is at risk of suffocating if she cannot get the weight of her belly back underneath her. We have mere minutes to save her.

I shake Kevin awake and tell him to meet me in the corral with our telehandler. I run through our yard, past the barn, grab a pitchfork and continue my sprint into the corral, the winter air filling my lungs in a panic and fury.

I see her yellow ear tag in the darkness, 157, and know she has another month of pregnancy left. She is already exhausted and short of breath, but when I drop to my knees to push her with my weight near her front shoulders, she gives a gallant swing up with her neck and head and front legs. I heave with her 1,500-pound mass as hard as I can. But she collapses back, and I fall backward.

I get back up and try to use the pitchfork as a lever on her back hips, but she is losing strength. I move to her belly and try to remove straw while I wait for Kevin to arrive with the telehandler and bucket attachment -- our only chance now to lift her back up and avoid a terrible death.

Kevin drives into the corral, and I direct him to lower the bucket into the straw and scoop underneath her shoulders and belly so she will not be injured in the process. The lift of the bucket bottom provides the leverage she needs and easily bears her weight. She stumbles up, walks several feet and then stands still as her pregnant belly recenters and she regains her breath. The pregnant cow seems fine within moments.

Kevin spots me, steps out of the telehandler and asks me if I am OK because he notices that I had put my hand over my

heart. I tell him not to panic, but I might be having a heart attack. Or an asthma attack. Or a panic attack myself. I've never had any of the three.

I walk slowly out of the corral. Kevin holds my hand and calmly directs me in the dark while my airway tightens, a weight settles on my chest, pain twinges between my shoulders and nausea wells in my throat. I vomit several times once inside the house but manage to take several aspirin.

Later I lie on an exam table for an electrocardiogram.

While wires record the electrical signals of my heart, I wonder at the worries of the world and how they press on the literal and figurative heart.

Big world problems weigh in -- from war to political division, economic turmoil, natural disasters and hatred in the name of religion, ethnicity and country. The distrust, discontent and disdain people exclaim on social media for each other is disheartening.

I am also discouraged by news articles that vilify ranchers and cattle as ruinous to our planet. North Dakotans post on Joel Heitkamp's Facebook page that they hope farmers, who supposedly all voted for Trump and are also supposedly rich from subsidies, reap what they sow and suffer.

I post nothing in response, but I calculate that the subsidy from the Emergency Commodity Assistance Program gave us about a 10% boost to our gross revenue while inputs remain about 30% to 40% higher than pre-COVID-19 prices, and commodity prices for our crops are down 30% to 40% from that time period.

The U.S. Agriculture Department has created socialist safety nets for farmers while ensuring an affordable food policy and mass production. One can argue that such safety nets, price protection and volume of production should not exist, but I don't understand the wish for the No. 1 indus-

try in our state to fail because of how one or many voted. Wishing ill upon our neighbors and communities because of perceived political differences on both sides is symptomatic of baser human nature and a truly broken world.

On Easter Sunday, I lie sick in bed with a pesky cold instead of attending the service at Grace Lutheran in Wildrose. My health app indicates that I have slept about an average of five hours a night with two wake-ups for the past few months. I am run down, worn out. Nyquil, Vicks VapoRub, a sinus cleanser, several boxes of Kleenex and cough drops do little to restore my respiratory system or my spirit. My Bible has gathered dust. Physical and spiritual health have been neglected.

Weak pulled chest muscles, thankfully not a heart attack, were the result of pushing 157 without success. Falling short, failing to do necessary tasks, worrying versus praying and feeling rather sorry for myself is the mindset in which I wallow.

Kevin comes into my room at lunchtime and asks me to join him and the kids for cheeseburgers he made. I feel a lot better seeing the clean kitchen, eating good beef and spending a few moments with my family. I glance at a Bible verse that hangs on my kitchen wall: Isaiah 41:10. "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you."

I check the cameras Sunday afternoon. We have a handful of cows left to deliver. I zoom in on a cow who is contracting with labor. It is 157, and within minutes she delivers a heifer calf. She has survived, and now her baby is with us -- healthy and hearty, and a new joy to witness on the ranch.

Weak of heart and mind on this Easter, I am again reminded of all the undeserved blessings we are daily given. Despite our fallibility and failures, the calf's arrival is a timely sign and reminder of God's love and eternal promise to us.

Sydney Glasoe Caraballo is a fifth-generation rancher and farmer who manages Glasoe Angus near Wildrose.

Still more bills to debate

As the 69th legislative session moves toward the finish line, there are several important bills still being debated.

One bill, Senate Bill 2397, would change the definition of a non-oil-producing county. This bill, as amended by the House, would exempt a development incentive well from the 5% extraction tax during the first 36 months of production, up to 300,000 barrels.

The well would be subject to certification by the Department of Mineral Resources and would have to be drilled in an existing spacing unit. It would have to use a new or innovative drilling or completion technique that constitutes a technical advancement beyond current industry standards.

A spokesperson from Continental Resources said the tax incentive created in this legislation could lead to development of innovative technology that would yield

Capitol Views

By Rep. Bert Anderson R-Crosby



additional production well into the future.

Another bill, Senate Bill 2012, is the Department of Transportation budget. Discussion by the House Government Operations Division of the House Appropriations Committee included the addition of language that would also change the definition of non-oil-producing counties. It would change from a county that receives more than \$5 million in gross production tax revenues to one that produces fewer than 10 million barrels per year. It would allow lesser-producing counties such as Billings, Burke and Divide to access much-needed infrastructure funding.

Senate Bill 2339 is a bill that would limit the liability of electric utilities if it is believed their power lines have sparked a wildfire, provided they have a mitigation plan in place. This bill was passed in the House, after initially failing, when it was brought back for reconsideration.

The final weeks of the session get quite intense as the conference committees work out the differences between House and Senate versions of the bills. We are also working toward balancing the budget, while still providing the necessary services needed by the residents of North Dakota.

Once again, I thank you for allowing me the privilege of serving the fine people of District 2 during this legislative session. Should you have reason to contact me during these final days, please email me at bertanderson@ndlegis.gov.

Improving Social Security

The Social Security Administration has struggled with customer service for years. Declining staffing and funding have left North Dakotans in the lurch, dealing with long wait times on the phone and in Social Security offices, busy signals on the phone or being unable to reach anyone for their customer service needs. SSA scrapped a service change last week that would have forced many North Dakotans to go to a Social Security office in person for routine services currently handled over the phone. This would have been a significant barrier to service in a state where 13,000 people over 65 live 180 miles round-trip from the nearest SSA office.

No organization has been more outspoken about tackling SSA's customer service issues than AARP.

While we're encouraged that SSA is listening to customer service concerns, we won't take potential improvements for granted. The incoming Social Security administrator needs to focus on delivering effective and efficient customer service to everyone who needs access to Social Security.

Other Views

By Nancy Guy AARP North Dakota

According to SSA's own data, call wait times, hold times and customer service resolutions have been inconsistent for years. Call volume to SSA has increased substantially, and wait times are rising. Fewer people can reach a Social Security representative to meet their needs, and fewer people are getting resolutions to their problems.

It doesn't help that Congress hasn't provided the funding necessary to ensure Social Security can deliver quality customer service. Funding to improve the program has long been on the decline. SSA funding has dropped by 9% since 2018.

This challenge emerges just as more people -- approximately 10,000 people every day -- are retiring.

Yet, SSA has been unclear and uncommunicative with the public about its customer service issues in 2025. From backtracking on phone service changes to confusion over of-

fice closures, SSA's public controversies have driven anxiety for Americans everywhere. If they don't commit to customer service improvements, it will cause real hardship for many older Americans trying to get the Social Security they have earned.

The incoming Social Security commissioner would be well served by recommitting SSA to providing timely, efficient and effective customer service. SSA must be clear when communicating any possible changes and the effects of lower staffing levels. And Congress needs to provide oversight to ensure that customer service is prioritized at an agency that has struggled to serve Americans everywhere.

You earned your Social Security benefits.

Nancy Guy, Bismarck, is AARP North Dakota volunteer state president.

Republished with permission from North Dakota Monitor, a nonprofit, nonpartisan source for trusted news, commentary and insight into statewide policy and critical issues affecting the Peace Garden State. Follow at northdakotamonitor.com.