

UPSIDE DOWN UNDER

North Dakota’s bizarre summer weather

BY MARVIN BAKER

There’s no doubt in anyone’s mind that this summer has been quite unusual in terms of weather conditions. Granted, we say that every year, but this season has been quite different than the norm.

The most obvious thing has been in the amount of precipitation that has fallen across the state. Right now, only Pembina and Cavalier counties have abnormally dry conditions, which is weird in and of itself. Pembina County, especially, is normally one of the “wetter” counties in the state.



This summer, the southwest has had far more rainfall than it normally gets. I doubt any records are being broken, but suffice to say, it isn’t the norm.

When our family took our annual mini-vacation to Medora at the end of July, we were absolutely astounded at how green it was in the Badlands. A year ago, that same trip on that same weekend was wrought with grasshoppers, intense heat and drought conditions.

Medora isn’t supposed to be green at the end of July. In mid-August, my wife and I attended our grand-son’s birthday party at a rural residence east of Lincoln. When I was in high school and working after high school, I traveled that road a lot from Hazelton to Bismarck and back.

I never saw it so green in the month of August. I told my wife I’m finding a hard time wrapping my head around this because it’s August, it’s harvest and high school football practice has started. It’s supposed to be hot and dried up in August and grasshoppers are usually invading the ripe cereal grains about to be harvested.

June, which has traditionally been our wettest month, appears to have switched places with August. We had far more rain in May than we did in June, generally speaking, then July brought much more rain than June and now August has produced twice the amount of precipitation as June did, again generally speaking because there are pockets of anomalies.

Take Ellendale for instance. That community in Dickey County has been getting dumped on all summer. You’d think it was a community in southeastern Iowa or something with all the rain it’s had. Typically well over an inch and often times up to 2 inches of rain in each event. The last time I looked, El-lendale was in North Dakota, and to get that kind of rain in August, it doesn’t compute.

Linton, Hettinger, Fort Yates and Carson have also had unusual amounts of rain. And when you go fur-ther east to LaMoure and points east of there, locals say they’ve never seen precipitation like these past two summers.

We’ve also witnessed a change in temperatures. Because we are now late into the summer, I can safely say most reporting stations in the state have not reached 100 degrees all summer. Typically, most places, Grand Forks and Devils Lake being the exceptions, reach 100 at least one time each summer. Not this year. Only a few places in the far west have hit that benchmark.

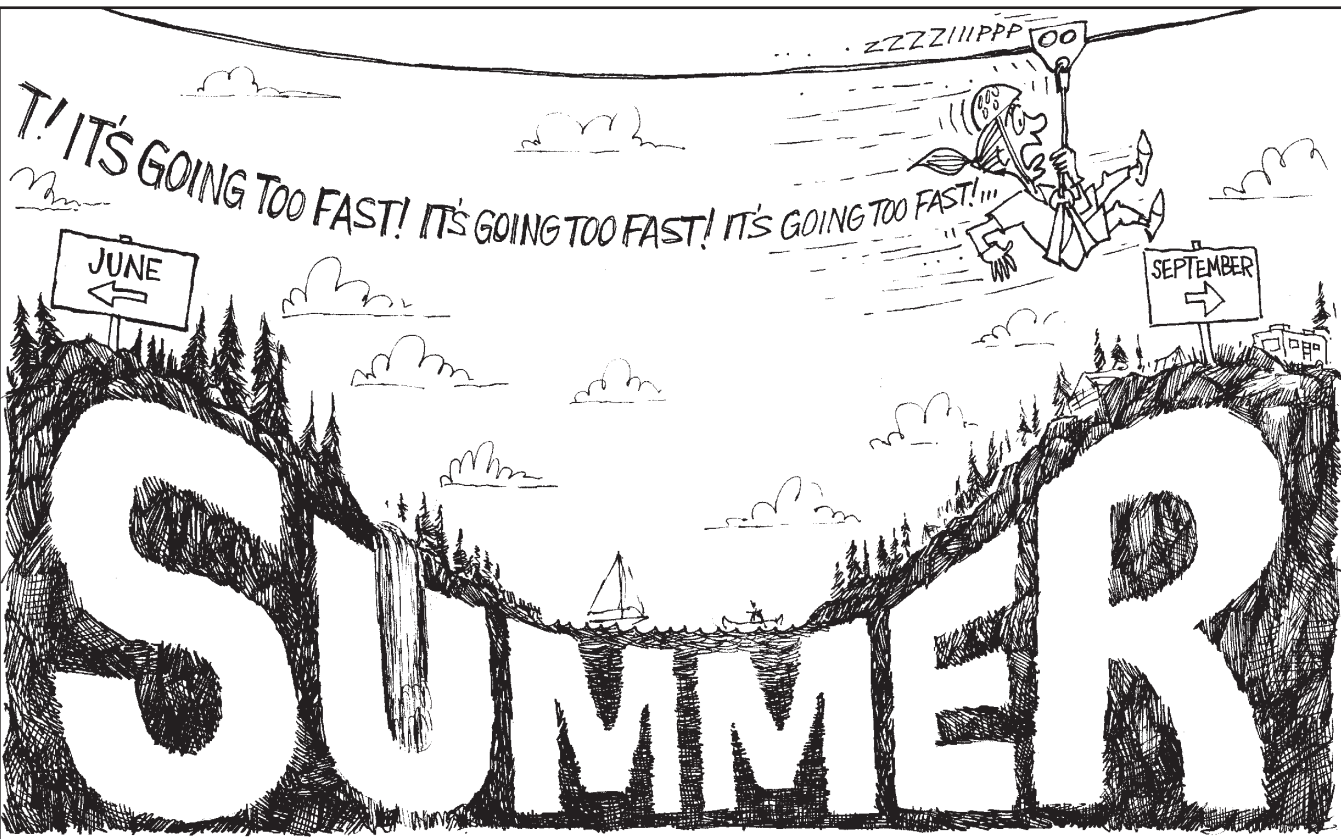
Rewind to four years ago when northwestern North Dakota saw nine days hit 100 or go past it. Three days in June, three days in July and three days in August. In 1936, which has always been the benchmark for heat and drought, saw four days hit 100 or higher.

The same can be said for fall and winter. The months of October and November can be pivotal months going into winter. But in recent years, the month of November at least, has been quite mild across nearly the entire state. That’s not terribly unusual, but to see that trend slipping into December is an anomaly.

If you look back at statistics, the first half of December has become more mild in recent years and when you see the UPS guy delivering packages on December 10 wearing shorts and a T-shirt, on the northern tier of North Dakota, you know it’s not normal.

March and April have changed too. People often ask me if I plant my potatoes on Good Friday. My response, only if I had a jackhammer out there to chisel the frozen ground loose.

(Marvin Baker is a news writer for the Kenmare News and formerly Foster County Independent.)



GUEST

North Dakota rural health issues

The North Dakota Rural Health Association (NDRHA) represents and advocates for rural North Dakotans on a range of health issues. Federal health policy does not always work well in rural areas. Nationally, only 20% of Americans are classified as rural; nevertheless, rural populations are more reliant on federal health and social service programming. A higher percentage of rural residents receive Medicaid than urban. In North Dakota, 54% of the people using Medicaid are rural. In rural North Dakota, people have pride in their communities. They care about their neighbors. The people they meet at the clinic are the same people they sit next to at the basketball game, or at church, or visit with in the grocery store. Rural communities tend to be collaborative, creative and resilient. People band together for the good of the town. At the same time rural areas have barriers to deal with that impact both health and health care.

One barrier is access to care, which includes physical remoteness and isolation, the distance between services and resources; financial insecurity such as higher rates of unemployment, poverty and less health insurance; lower and less reliable payment to health care providers and facilities; and health workforce shortages and maldistribution.

A second barrier is “mortar and brick” or the physical infrastructure of a community and a health system. The third barrier is technology,

including broadband which is essential for modern health systems. And a fourth barrier is economics, including maintaining a viable local economy providing good paying jobs and growth opportunities.

What happens in Washington, D.C. has an impact on us in our daily lives affecting family and friends. The recently passed One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) is a massive federal policy change that impacts our health care system and even our personal health.

The OBBBA ushered in many health-related changes that can have a negative impact on rural North Dakota. This includes reducing access to care and contributing to poorer health outcomes. Over a 10 period, OBBBA will cut Medicaid by \$1 trillion nationally. This includes a projected \$1.4 billion cut to North Dakota (source: North Dakota Legislative Council). The cause of reductions is related to a stronger work requirement. The new work requirement stipulation is not necessarily a bad idea; however, nationally, 67% of adult Medicaid recipients already work (72% in North Dakota). Another 20-25% are either disabled/have medical issues preventing work or are family care givers and not required to seek employment.

Nationally, the federal government estimates that 12-17 million would lose Medicaid coverage, primarily those in Medicaid Expansion. Out of the 105,000 North Dakota Medicaid recipients,

upwards of 18% or 19,000 would lose access in the state (Legislative Council). The reason for the reduction in the number of Medicaid participants is directly related to implementing the work, and especially the reporting, requirement. The administrative function is needlessly burdensome – applying twice a year, reporting work data, online, monthly to prove they are working, dealing with cumbersome online systems and technology, making re-application mistakes and/or administration burdens, having to wait to reapply, and added service costs/out-of-pocket expenses for those on Medicaid Expansion (\$35 service fee). Nationally, about 40% receiving Medicaid Expansion are expected to lose access. With rural North Dakota’s high utilization of Medicaid, this will have a profound impact in rural areas for patients and health providers. Future policy needs to ensure that work requirements help as oppose to harming rural communities.

In addition to Medicaid, there are serious modifications to the ACA Marketplace, the federally supported health insurance option. About 45,000 North Dakotans have insurance through the Marketplace. The OBBBA eliminates the expanded tax credit that buys down the cost to the subscriber. This will increase premium costs, some as high as 75% for the 90% of North Dakotans who have their insurance through the Marketplace.

Other OBBBA concerns

impacting health are cuts and changes to “safety net” programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), home weatherization, fuel assistance and other services. This will negatively affect specific rural populations such as seniors, moms with children, veterans and people with disabilities.

We recognize that these changes not only affect rural citizens but also your local health system. The national projection is that over 300 rural hospitals will close, with North Dakota looking at a projected three closures. Due to cutbacks in payment and in the number of people having insurance through Medicaid and/or the ACA Marketplace, rural hospitals and clinics will have to cut back services offered and will see staff and provider reductions.

As one North Dakota Critical Access Hospital CEO commented, “People will still get sick. They will come to our emergency room, and we will treat them. But there will not be any funding to cover the cost, it will go to our bad debt. Also, emergency care is not primary care, there will be no continuation of prevention, wellness, and disease management. People will just get sicker.”

We encourage you to discuss your concerns with your local providers. NDRHA will stay committed to improving health and access to care for rural North Dakotans.

Brad Gibbens  
North Dakota Rural Health Association

– Weekly Crossword –

CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Utilitarian fashion accessory
- 4. Engine additive
- 7. Macaws
- 8. Listens to
- 10. Self-righteously moralistic person
- 12. Made of wood
- 13. Chinese lute
- 14. Beginning military rank
- 16. Indicates near
- 17. Ties the score
- 19. Chum
- 20. Long ago
- 21. Localities
- 25. Midway between northeast and east
- 26. Make fun of
- 27. Tennis great Arthur
- 29. Construction location
- 30. Cow’s noise
- 31. Blue
- 32. One of the Fab Four
- 39. Formula 1 team
- 41. Dash

- 42. Lifting device
- 43. Basics
- 44. Keyboard key
- 45. Old Irish alphabet
- 46. Shaking of the Earth’s surface
- 48. Covered stadium
- 49. Sword handles
- 50. Longing or yearning
- 51. Creators’ social network
- 52. Boxing’s GOAT

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Occur
- 2. Show up
- 3. Capital of Taiwan
- 4. Ocean
- 5. Givers and \_\_\_\_
- 6. Gets ready
- 8. Ad \_\_\_\_
- 9. Fit of irritation
- 11. Criminal organization
- 14. Exclamation that denotes disgust
- 15. American state
- 18. Sensor hub

- 19. Before
- 20. The boundary of a surface
- 22. Witnesses
- 23. Singular
- 24. Type of meal
- 27. Music awards show
- 28. Former French coin of low value
- 29. A bag-like structure in an animal
- 31. Schenectady County Airport
- 32. Calm down
- 33. Partner to cheese
- 34. Cola brand
- 35. Stepped on
- 36. Japanese city
- 37. Type of coating
- 38. A citizen of Yemen
- 39. Popular breakfast item
- 40. On a line at right angles to a ship’s length
- 44. First responders
- 47. Short-term memory

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