



The Groton Independent

Vol. 138 No. 32 ♦ Groton, South Dakota ♦ Wednesday, April 14, 2021 ♦ Established in 1889



Connie Stauch, Julie Hinds and Anita Lowary were the election workers at the Groton Community Center on Tuesday. The Groton Area Board of Education election was held across the district. Election results are on Page 3. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Weismantel, Pharis re-elected to School Board

The two incumbents were re-elected to the Groton Area Board of Education at Tuesday's election. Kara Pharis carried the Bristol and Andover precincts and had a total of 287 votes. Marty Weismantel carried the Columbia precinct and had a total of 283 votes. Ryan Tracy had 251 votes and Dr. Anna Schwan carried the Groton precinct and had a total of 216 votes. Voter turnout was 27.3 percent. Top two candidates in votes will earn a 3-year term beginning July 1, 2021.

	Anna Schwan	Martin D. Weismantel	Ryan Tracy	Kara M. Pharis	Poll Book Count
Andover	7	18	11	22	29
Bristol	17	22	51	104	123
Columbia	9	62	16	24	72
Groton	183	181	173	137	381
TOTAL	216	283	251	287	605
Eligible Voters: 2,550					
Ballots spoiled, rejected or uncounted: 4					



The Groton Area POPS Concert was held Sunday. Senior Alexis Hanten took a moment to thank everyone for supporting the music department and for supporting her high school singing career. She sang, "Thank You for the Music." More photos on pages 2-3 and back page.



From left to right: Carlee Johnson (Horn) and Gretchen Dinger (Flute)

(Courtesy Photo)

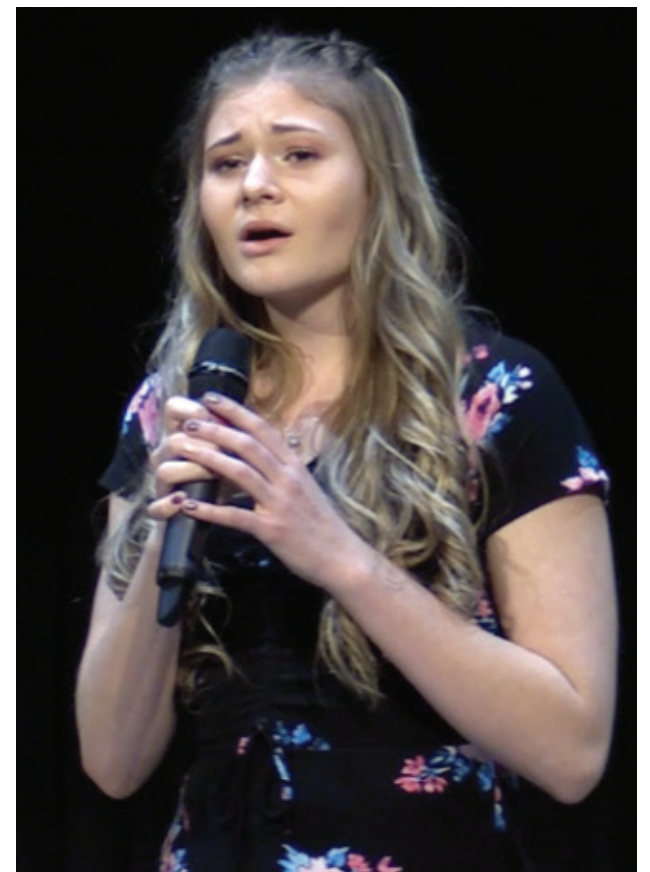
Dinger and Johnson accepted into SD Middle School All State Band

In December 2020, The South Dakota Music Education Association made the decision to cancel all SDMEA Events, due to COVID-19. Before this decision was made, 8th Grader Gretchen Dinger and 6th Grader Carlee Johnson had sent in their auditions for the 2021 SD Middle School All State Band. The decision was made to still seat and honor the students, even though the event was not going to be held.

The audition process for this band requires sending in a recording of a chromatic scale, a selected major and minor scale, an etude in 4/4 time, and an etude in 6/8 time. There were a total of 370 auditions sent in from the state of South Dakota, with 53 schools represented.

Both Dinger and Johnson were accepted into the top Honor Band. Dinger also received the high honor of being a three-year member. She is the first student from Groton Area to earn this honor. These ladies will be honored and recognized at the Middle School Band Concert on Thursday April 29th.

Congratulations Gretchen and Carlee on a wonderful accomplishment!

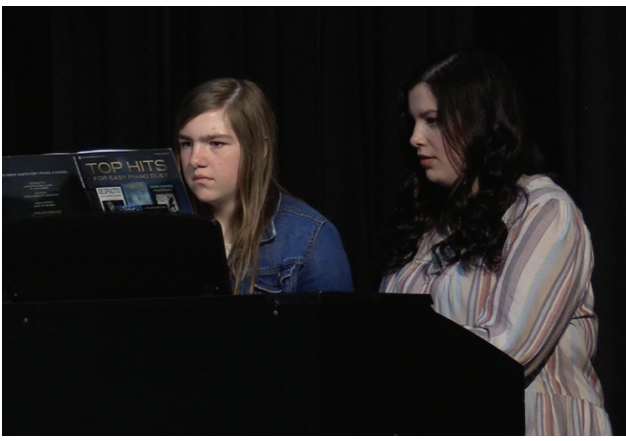


Julianna Kosel sang, "Blessings."

The junior high track meet scheduled for April 15 in Milbank and the varsity track meet scheduled for April 16, both in Milbank, have been cancelled.

The girls varsity golf meet scheduled for April 19 in Milbank has been rescheduled for Thursday, May 13.

Groton School Play, Frozen Jr., will be performed Thursday, April 15 at 7 p.m. and Saturday, April 17, at 5 p.m.



Emily Clark and Elliana Weismantel performed a piano duet entitled, "Shallow."



Jacob Lewandowski and Isaac Smith were the masters of ceremony for the POPS Concert held Sunday. They just announced that cell phones were suppose to be turned off when Smith "got" a phone call.



Ashtyn Bahr sang, "Driver's License." She was accompanied by Elliana Weismantel.



The Jazz Band did not perform this year due to COVID-19; however, there were a lot of individual performances to fill the gap. Here is Carter Barse leading things off with, "Edge of Seventeen."



Anna Bisbee sang, "Welcome to Wonderland."



Trinity Smith sang, "Die from a Broken Heart."



Elianna Weismantel performed a piano solo entitled, "Ain't No Sunshine."



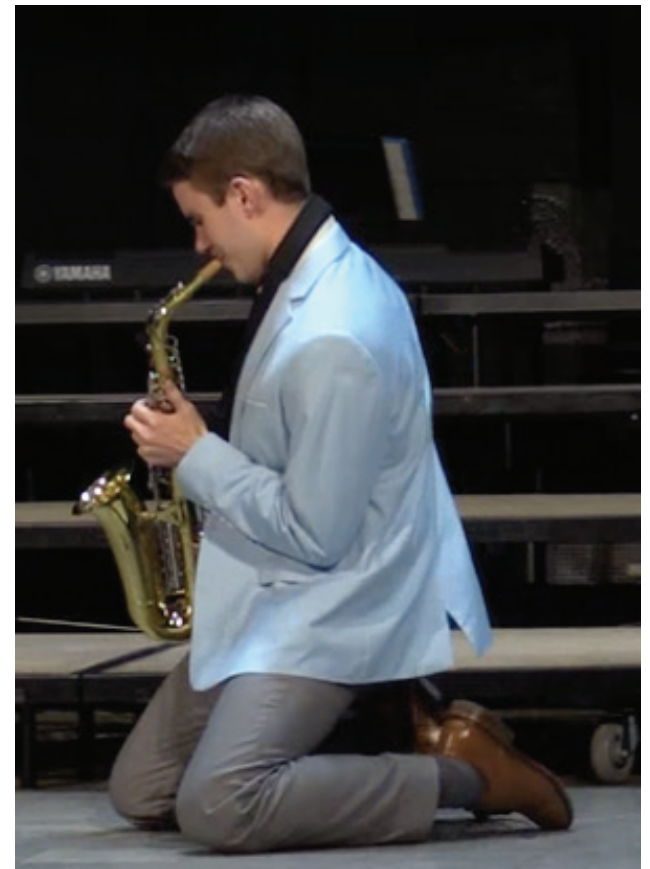
Camryn Kurtz and Anna Bisbee sang a duet entitled, "Rolling in the Deep."



Cadance Tullis and Elliana Weismantel performed a Marimba duet entitled, "Somebody You Loved."



The Front Boulevard Men had a comedy and they performed a melody mashup.



Kamryn Fliehs sang, "La Vie En Rose."



Shaylee Peterson sang, "Journey to the Past."



Cadance Tullis sang, "Chasing Pavements."



Alexis Hanten (left) and Julianna Kosel (right) along with Camryn Kurtz had a show choir part during a transition.



The music directors also performed. Austin Fordham, Kayla Duncan and Desiree Yeigh sang, "Fire and Fury."

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DIABETES

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HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

HEART DISEASE

If you or someone you know has any of the above conditions or is taking medications for the above conditions and would like to participate in a research study.

Call 605-274-9549 for more information.



Trinity Smith, Ashtyn Bahr, Hailey Monson, Elliana Weismantel, Sierra Ehresmann and Shaylee Peterson were the backup singers to Alexis Hanten as they performed, "I Won't Say (I'm in Love)."

**Columbia City
April 7, 2021
Meeting Minutes**

City of Columbia Council Meeting – April 7, 2021
CALL MEETING TO ORDER – 7:00 p.m.
ROLL CALL – Cara Dennert, Emily Eichler, Ellen Harr, Cole Kampa, Trevor Meints, Corey Mitchell
Community – Jeremy Dosch
Corey Mitchell called the meeting to order. Minutes were passed out from the March 3rd meeting. Trevor Meints made a motion to accept the minutes as presented. Ellen Harr seconded the motion. All in favor – motion carried. Minutes were passed out from the March 17th Equalization meeting. Ellen Harr made a motion to accept the minutes as presented. Emily Eichler seconded the motion. All in favor – motion carried.

Warrant Vouchers: JVT – 125.77; Web Water – 38.26 ; Northwestern Energy – 822.66; GDI –55.32; Jeremy Dosch – 419.99; Kelsie Ehresmann – 293.99; Cara Dennert – 823.50; Corey Mitchell – 348.08; Cole Kampa – 288.23; Trevor Meints – 288.23; Ellen Harr – 288.23; Emily Eichler – 288.23; Runnings –318.19; Great Western Bank –157.92; Brown County Landfill – 5,246.64; US Treasury – 1749.81; SD Unemployment Insurance – 6.70; NASASP – 39.00; Kolker Law Office – 133.66; SD Dept. of Revenue – 150.00; Web Water – 39.31; Northwestern Energy – 566.61
Emily Eichler made a motion

to accept the vouchers as presented. Trevor Meints seconded the motion. All in favor – motion carried.

COMMUNITY COMMENTS / CORRESPONDENCE – letter regarding landfill from DENR

UNFINISHED BUSINESS – There were no changes to the current suspended Columbia Covid19 ordinance. There are still a couple residences in town not in compliance with our dog ordinance. The sheriff may have to serve application papers. There was a community meeting on March 21st regarding the ballpark. A committee was formed to get a new location in the works.

Nuisances – It was discussed that when a vehicle is tagged, it will be also tagged with a letter stating the noncompliance of the city ordinance – and that letter will also be mailed to the individual.

Streets - Travis from B&B will be contacted about blading the streets soon. Corey discussed the drainage issue in town. He reviewed a letter from an engineer at the IMEG Corporation. He will send this letter on to our lawyer.

Parks - The ballpark committee has measured the school lot and have been in communication with a few UCC church board members. They will be flagging the lot and sending the church an ariel picture of how the park could be laid out. The outfield line would only go over on to the church's lot by about 50 feet. Hopefully something can be worked out so that everyone will be in agreement.

Lagoon/sewer – Cole asked about a discharge. That will probably be put on hold and a transfer from one lagoon to the other will probably happen. The road between the lagoons in full of holes. It needs a load of clay to fix the issue.

Rubble Site –DENR sent the council a letter regarding the site. They are very pleased with the condition of the site. They are requiring better record keeping of what is put into the site from now on. The board discussed talking to someone in town to see if they would be willing to monitor the site and the loads coming into the site. Certain days/hours will be set soon so that residents can utilize the site, but until it can be monitored, it needs to remain locked.

NEW BUSINESS – The Lodge's on/off sale beer license was up for renewal. Cole Kampa made a motion to renew their license. Ellen Harr seconded the motion. All were in favor – motion carried.

FINANCIAL REPORT – Cara presented bank balances and the annual report. Board members were given copies of this report. It will be published in the paper and sent on to the State Department of Legislative Audit. Trevor Meints made a motion to accept the financial reports as given. Emily Eichler seconded the motion. All were in favor – motion carried.

March 31, 2021 balances: SF - \$173,137.33; GF – \$162,629.90; FIT - \$13,978.76

Cash on hand – \$95.00
Ellen Harr made a motion to adjourn. Cole Kampa seconded the motion. All were in favor – meeting adjourned.

Next City Council Meeting - May 5, 2021 8:00 p.m. (Later start time because of field work.)

Submitted by Cara Dennert, Finance Officer
Published once at the total approximate cost of \$44.67. 19967

**Brown County
April 6, 2021
Meeting Minutes**

APRIL 6, 2021 –GENERAL MEETING: Meeting called to order by Commission Chair Fjeldheim at 8:45 A.M. in the Commission Chambers, Courthouse Annex, Brown County, SD. Present were Commissioners Feickert, Sutton and Wiese. Commissioner Kippley attended over the phone. Commissioner Feickert led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA: Moved by Sutton, seconded by Feickert to approve the agenda. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

MINUTES: Moved by Sutton, seconded by Wiese to approve the general meeting minutes of March 30, 2021. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

CLAIMS: Moved by Feickert, seconded by Wiese to approve the following claims:

Other: Aberdeen Kirby \$320.00; City of Hecla \$800.00; Emma Burnham Public Library \$1,000.00; Groton Township \$1,000.00; City of Aberdeen \$12,000.00; Warner Library \$1,000.00. Professional Fees: City of Aberdeen \$498.91; Avera St. Luke's \$54.18; Avera McKennan Hospital \$74.71; Avera St. Luke's \$1,268.19; BCT \$21.20; Drew Becker \$200.00; Birmingham & Cwach Law Office \$476.85; CGI \$1,164.52; Cogley Law Office \$7,656.25; Dohrer Law Office \$7,656.25; Christopher Haar \$7,116.71; Houston Engineering \$6,411.40; Mark Katterhagen \$27.00; Kuck Law \$7,070.31; Lucy Lewno \$290.00; Darcy Lockwood \$27.00; Matthew Bender \$68.08; Jerald McNearly \$7,070.31; NE Mental Health Center \$1,586.00; Sanford Health \$4,431.13; SD Dept. of Health \$1,215.00; State of South Dakota \$16,671.85; Christy Griffin-Serr Law \$7,070.31; Tammy Stolle Court Reporting \$36.50; Taliaferro Law Firm \$7,656.25; Tyler Technologies \$520.00; University of North Dakota \$300.00; West Publishing \$350.10. Publishing: Groton Independent \$107.55. Repairs & Maintenance: Aberdeen Clean-All \$325.00; Dakota Doors \$3,383.77; Lang's Audio TV & Appliance \$246.00; Nardini Fire Equipment \$190.50; Pro-Windmill \$345.00; Pierson-Ford \$79.18; Ringgenberg Electric \$2,433.90; Sherwin Williams \$81.01; Kirby Kiesz \$142.80; Western States Fire \$3,789.42. Supplies: American Business Forms \$100.00; Aramark \$77.43; Cole Papers \$354.60; Farnams Genuine Parts \$279.98; Fastenal \$51.13; GovConnection \$544.36; L.G. Everist \$6,559.03; Larry Becker \$802.47; Leidhold Tool Sales \$89.02; Lucy Lewno \$8.76; Marco \$19.33; McKesson Medical \$239.39; Menards

\$313.02; Midstates Printing \$828.00; Performance Rentals \$100.00; Runnings \$61.14; Kirby Kiesz \$171.54. Travel & Conference: Regency Midwest Ventures \$606.00. Utilities: AT & T Mobility \$197.42; Qwest Corporation \$60.62; Montana Dakota Utilities \$44.11; Northwestern Energy \$2,552.39. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

HR REPORT: Moved by Sutton, seconded by Wiese to approve the HR Office Report, which includes the following: Acknowledge retirement of Daryl Lloyd, Brown County Highway Department, full-time, effective April 2, 2021. Approve hiring of Brandon Richardson as full-time Brown County Correctional officer effective April 5, 2021 @ \$16.82/hour. Approve hiring of Breanna Locke Brown County Fairgrounds full-time summer-help effective April 12, 2021 @ \$12.29/hour. Approve hiring of John Noyes as Brown County State's Attorney intern effective May 12, 2021 @ \$500/week. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

FAIR CONTRACTS: Moved by Feickert, seconded by Wiese to approve the following Brown County Fair Agreement: Deb Stamm @ \$100 (4-H Judge). All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

BRIDGE IMPROVEMENT GRANT AWARD: Moved by Wiese, seconded by Sutton to approve and authorize the Chair to sign the Bridge Improvement Grant (BIG) Agreement with the SD Department of Transportation for Rehabilitation/Replacement of BRO-8007(00)21-1, PCN 08FG. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

LEASE_DAKOTA SLIDEWAYZ: Lease tabled for next week. No actions taken.

LEASE_MOSBRUCKER RODEO: Moved by Kippley, seconded by Feickert to approve lease agreement with Mosbrucker Rodeo for the lease of Expo Building and Expo Addition on April 9-10. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

CLAIM ASSIGNMENTS: Moved by Feickert, seconded by Sutton to authorize Auditor sign documentation to assign claim against an individual to Credit Collection Bureau for the purpose of collecting liens. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

ABATEMENTS: Moved by Sutton, seconded by Wiese to approve the following abatement: West Rondell Township @ \$13,189.77. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

BROWN COUNTY PDM PLAN AND CONTRACT: Scott Meints(EM Director), Lesleann Palmer & Alison Kiesz(NECOG) met with the Commission to discuss about the Pre Disaster Mitigation Plan Assistance for Brown County. Moved by Sutton, seconded by Wiese to approve and authorize the chair to sign the agreement for Pre Disaster Mitigation (PDM) Plan Assistance with Northeast Council of Governments (NECOG). All members present voting aye. Motion Carried

ANNUAL CONFERENCE WITH DOE: Gene Loeschke, Director of Equalization, met for conference per SDCL 10-3-14, discussing County Equalization, County Consolidated Boards of Equalization and the Agricultural Land Assessment. No actions taken.

DISCRETIONARY FORMULA RESOLUTION:

Commissioner Sutton offered the following Resolution: RESOLUTION 19-21

Whereas, The Brown County Commission has adopted a "discretionary formula" for certain structures in Brown County.

Whereas, SDCL 10-6-35.2 authorizes the Board of County Commissioners, at its discretion, to adopt a formula for the assessment of structures classified as "industrial".

Whereas, for the purpose of this resolution an "industrial structure" is defined as: "Generally, any property used in a manufacturing activity, including a factory, wholesale bakery, dairy plant, food processing plant, mill, mine, quarry, all locally assessed utility property, and the like". Glossary for Property Appraisal and Assessment, pg134, (International Association of Assessing Officers, 2nd ed. 2013).

Whereas, SDCL 10-6-35.2 states the formula may include for any or all of the five tax years following construction, all, any portion, or none of the assessed valuation for tax purposes.

Whereas, the board of County Commissioners may, if requested by the owner of any property described as above, not apply the above formula, in which case the full assessment shall be made without application of the formula. In waiving this formula for one structure for one owner, the Board of County Commissioners is not prohibited from applying the formula for subsequent new structures by that owner.

Whereas, the current discretionary formula does allow for a

level of assessment for all qualifying structures to be at 0% the first year, 0% the second year, 0% the third year, 0% the fourth year and 0% the fifth year.

Whereas, the assessed value during any of the five years may not be less than the assessed valuation of the property year preceding the first year of the tax years following construction.

Whereas, any structure that is partially constructed on the assessment date may be valued for tax purposes pursuant to this resolution and the valuation may not be less than the assessed valuation of the property in the year preceding the beginning of construction.

Whereas, the county hopes all eligible projects will avail themselves to the formula, and exercise their responsibility to notify the county.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Brown County Board of Commissioners hereby adopts a new discretionary formula as authorized by SDCL 10-6-35.2. Upon recommendation by the Director of Equalization and approval by the Board of County Commissioners, the level of assessment for structures on properties classified as "industrial" as defined previously in this document, and built on land with "industrial zoning" classification, shall be 0% the first year, 0% the second year, 0% the third year, 0%

the fourth year, and 0% the fifth year. This formula shall be applied to any new industrial structures and additions with construction start date of July 1, 2020 or later.

Dated this 6th day of April, 2021.

Seconded by Commissioner Wiese. Roll call vote: Commissioners Feickert-nay, Sutton-aye, Wiese-aye, Fjeldheim-aye, Kippley-aye. Resolution adopted.

SOUTH DUMPSITE RELOCATION: Dawn Shepard met with the Commission to inquire and gather updates about south dumpsite relocation area. No actions taken.

PLANNING & ZONING SECRETARY: Scott Bader (P&Z Director) met with the commission to discuss about updating the job description and salary compensation for its department secretary prior to hiring. No actions taken.

ADJOURNMENT: Moved by Sutton, seconded by Feickert to adjourn the Brown County Commission at 9:44a.m. All members present voting aye. Motion carried.

Jeannette McClain, Brown County Deputy Auditor

Published once at the total approximate cost of \$91.09. 19968.

**Groton City
April 6, 2021
Meeting Minutes**

April 6, 2021

The Groton City Council met on the above date at 7:00 pm at 120 N Main Street for their first monthly meeting with the following members present: Kappes, Wells, Fliehs, Babcock, Blackmun, Cutler and Hanlon presiding. Also present were: Attorney Drew Johnson, Paul Kosel, Finance Officer Hope Block, Officer Tony Garcia, Terry Herron, Midco representatives: Aaron Kietzmann, Brian McFadden, Ryan Barr, Rob Moore, and Tony Hyder.

The bid opening for 2021 Street Resurfacing was held with the following results: Jensen Rock and Sand \$1.87-unit price, Astech Corp \$1.89-unit price, Topkote, Inc. \$1.664-unit price, and Bituminous Paving, Inc. \$2.31-unit price. Moved by Blackmun and seconded by Cutler to award the project to Topkote Inc.'s low bid of \$1.664-unit price. All members voted aye.

The first reading of Ordinance #744 Cable Franchise Ordinance with Midcontinent Communications and Ordinance #745 Cable Franchise Ordinance with James Valley Telecommunications was approved on a motion by Fliehs and seconded by Wells. All members voted aye. Midco representatives were thanked for attending the meeting, and they left at this point.

Public comments were welcomed pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1, but none were received.

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved on a motion by Wells and seconded by Babcock. All members voted aye.

Moved by Cutler and seconded by Kappes to authorize the following bills for payment. All members voted aye. Payroll, \$30,552.83, Employee salaries; Executive, \$2,012.71; Administrative, \$3,960.26; Public Safety, \$13,144.42; Public Works, \$11,426.16; Culture & Recreation, \$9.28; First State Bank, \$7,375.27, SS and WH; First State Bank, \$495.82, HSA contributions; Dakotaland FCU, \$650.00, Employee sav-

ings; Aflac, \$309.60, Employee insurance; Colonial Life, \$90.16, Employee insurance; Guardian Insurance, \$108.91, Employee insurance; Aramark, \$48.03, Rug rent; Branden Abeln, \$20.00, Personal phone use; Landon Johnson, \$20.00, Personal phone use; Paul Kosel, \$20.00, Personal phone use; April Abeln, \$147.30, Personal phone use and med flex; Hope Block, \$20.00, Personal phone use; Kellie Locke, \$20.00, Personal phone use; SD Gov Finance Officers' Assn, \$30.00, Dues Kl; SD State Treasurer, \$9,800.29, Sales tax; City of Groton, \$250.00, Utility deposit refund; Titles of Dakota, \$204,907.00, 120 N Main building purchase; SD Retirement System, \$8,638.15, Employee retirement; Employees Mutual Life, \$77.30, Employee insurance; Groton Independent, \$234.09, Publishing and subscription; Clark Engineering, \$3,888.42, Water tower construction staking and admin; Dave's Marine, \$556.00, Bench in memory of T.J. Johnson; Aberdeen Hardball Assn, \$250.00, Jr Teener tournament fee; Terry Herron, \$623.12, Med flex, mileage for DENR meeting; SD Dept of Health, \$30.00, Water testing; Locators & Supplies, \$197.52, Red flags and paint; WEB Water, \$14,226.63, Water 3/21; Western Area Power, \$22,384.19, Power 3/21; Jesse Zak, \$1,030.00, HWH rebate; McLeod's, \$18.55, In person absentee ballots; A&B Solutions, \$310.61, Copier rent; SDPAA, \$805.75, Addition of 120 N Main (995,049 replacement value); Drew Johnson, \$2,450.00, Legal fees 3/21; Share Corp, \$218.78, Car guard; S&S Lumber, \$201.12, Silicone, broom, nets, black jack, faucet, gloves, batteries; Border States, \$82.04, Hard hats; Groton Ford, \$1,098.69, 17 Ford replaced alternator; Scott Hanlon, \$46.40, Mileage for DENR meeting and closing; Hope Block, \$46.40, Mileage for DENR meeting and closing; Greg Heilman, \$100.00, Backhoe use

Moved by Blackmun and seconded by Kappes to surplus the following lawn mowers at the set prices: 2009 John Deere F687 Ztrak with 48" deck (1550 hours), originally \$6900, sell for \$550 (PARK), 2001 John Deere 1420 with 60" deck (2415 hours), originally \$17899, sell for \$2250 (SHOP), John Deere 445 Ztrak with 54" deck, motor is shot – sell for \$200, 1993 John Deere 445 with 48" deck, originally \$950 in 2017, fuel pump is out – sell for \$150 (SHOP). All members voted aye.

Citywide cleanup dates were announced to be April 23rd to April 30th.

Department reports were reviewed and discussed.

Ken's Food Fair, Olde Bank N' Café, MJ's Sinclair, and Dollar General 2021-2022 Malt Beverage License Renewals were approved on a motion by Blackmun and seconded by Fliehs. All members voted aye.

An announcement was made that the City obtained a \$5,000 2021 Twins Fields for Kids matching grant for dugouts at the baseball field. Many thanks were given to the Twins Community Fund.

The following requests were approved on a motion by Blackmun and seconded by Cutler: AB Contracting payment #3 for \$52,253.55
Maguire Iron payment #7 for \$47,250.00
AB Contracting Change Order #1
Maguire Iron Change Order #2

All members voted aye.

An announcement was made that a new Library Board will be appointed soon. Anyone interested in serving on this board should contact City Hall.

Moved by Kappes and seconded by Fliehs to adjourn into executive session for personnel and legal items 1-25-2 (1) & (3) at 7:48pm. All members voted aye. Council reconvened into regular session at 9:03pm.

Moved by Cutler and seconded by Wells to hire the following seasonal employees: Wyatt Locke Assistant Jr Legion Coach, Bryson Wambach Gatekeeper, Bradin Althoff & Caleb Hoover PeeWee & Midget Coach at \$750 each, Matt Locke & Seth Erickson PeeWee & Midget Coach at \$500 each, Cole Simon, Tate Larson, Steven Paulson, Alyssa Thaler as groundskeepers. All members voted aye.

Moved by Blackmun and seconded by Fliehs to adjust the cemetery caretaker wage to \$14.50/hour. All members voted aye.

Moved by Kappes and seconded by Fliehs to adjourn the meeting at 9:05 pm. All members voted aye.

Scott Hanlon, Mayor, , , , Hope Block, Finance Officer
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District is in solid financial state; COVID-19 restrictions being lifted

It was all good news at the Groton Area Board of Education meeting held Monday night. Business Manager Mike Weber reported that the district is in solid financial state. He said that the district is about \$350,000 ahead of last year with the majority of that coming from federal funding.

The district is heading back to a sense of normality with COVID-19 becoming a minimal threat. "It makes me excited for next fall," said Superintendent Joe Schwan.

The district has not had any COVID-19 cases for the past two weeks. He said the rapid tests are way down and the district sent two boxes back to the state before they expire so they can be used in other areas.

With several big events coming up, Schwan said the only restriction is for sick kids to stay home. The mid-school temperature testing will be done away with - there were only a couple of students who had high temperature for the entire year. Also, the policy will be amended on busses for masking from required to recommended. It was also reported that all staff members who wanted the COVID Vaccine shot had their second one last week. There are a few that decided not to get the vaccine.

The eighth bus route that was started this year to pick up students in the Bath area has worked well, but the district is short drivers and Mike and Loren have had to run that route, taking them away from other responsibilities.

The food service account is looking good, according to Superintendent Joe Schwan, as the district is being reimbursed for all meals as all meals are currently free due to COVID-19 regulations.

All of the administrations returned their signed contracts for another year.

Greg Kjellsen was hired as the boys junior high basketball coach for the 2021-22 school year.

Shaun Wanner was hired as the head track coach for the 2021-22 school year.

The board approved the use of a school bus on April 22 for St. John's Lutheran Church for the Watertown Zoo.

The board approved the 2021-22 North Central Special Education Cooperative Membership Agreement.



Groton 7th Grade Poppy winners from Groton Unit 39

Pictured left to right are London Bahr 2nd place, Talli Wright 3rd place, and De Eh Tha Say 1st place. De Eh Tha Say will go on to the next level of competition. (Courtesy Photo)

Claremont Town April 6, 2021 Meeting Minutes

The board of trustees for the town of Claremont met on April 6 2021 at 7 pm in city hall. President Johnson called the meeting to order with trustees Rasmussen and Spencer. On a motion by Rasmussen and seconded by Spencer the minutes of the March meeting were approved. On a motion by Spencer and seconded by Rasmussen the following warrants were allowed: General: IRS, 1st quarter Fed report 241.00; NWE, Street lights and city hall, 389.53; James Valley, phone and internet, 91.33; Jack Klenger, 5hrs road grading, 80.00; GDI publishing, 13.52; Post Office, Stamps, 55.00; Dakota Doors Inc, shop overhead door, 170.41; Dacotah Bank, city hall loan, 573.55; Charla Rye, wage, 350.00; WSSW:waterdist. Maintenance LLC, pump debris from left, 391.88; NWE, water, 200.20; NWE, sewer, 63.34; SD Public Health Lab, water sampling, 15.00; BDM, water purchased, 848.20; Helms Asso,waste water grant, 433.50; Rural Development, water loan,576.00; A Resolution to raise the sewer rate to 51.70 a month was passed on a motion by Rasmussen and seconded by Spencer. David Beck has been contacted and agreed to finish putting new meters on. With no further business before the Board a motion to adjourn was made Rasmussen and seconded by Spencer. Motion carried. CRye F.O. Published once at the total approximate cost of \$14.10. 19971

Groton Chiropractic Clinic

Carol McFarland-Kutter, D.C.
1205 N 1st St., Groton 397-8204

Harry Implement

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CERTIFIED DEALER
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Educators and historians want politics kept out of new history and civics initiative

Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News Watch

Educators, historians and some elected officials are urging South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem and the state Department of Education to keep politics and personal bias out of the process to develop a new and enhanced civics and history education initiative for public K-12 schools across the state.

In her State of the State speech in January, the governor proposed one-time funding to enhance and expand teaching of civics and history in public schools, and the state Legislature approved her \$900,000 request during the spring session.

In response, the state education department has embarked on development of the South Dakota Civics and History Initiative, a two-year, four-pronged plan to create new teaching content, provide new resources and training for teachers, and increase access to civic and historical lessons and experiences for students, especially at the elementary level. When the plan is finalized, use of the program will be optional for school districts.

Noem joined many other state and national leaders who in recent years have raised concerns that the two subjects have been deemphasized in the public school system, or that students have failed to learn basic facts about state history and how government works.

Noem, a conservative Republican, has supported efforts to improve civics education before, but her recent funding allocation and initiative come as she has taken an increasingly strong position on social issues and has sought to raise her profile in the national political arena.

Noem has been an ardent supporter of former President Donald Trump, who in December 2020 released the final report of the 1776 Commission, which promoted "patriotic education" and criticized "progressive educators" who the commission alleged have tried to shape student thinking to align with their liberal personal and political views.

Some criticism arises

In the months since Noem announced her civics and history proposal, the volatility of proposing a new statewide initiative was made clear as criticism arose on several fronts.

Some lawmakers argued that the state, which historically has left classroom teaching decisions to local school districts, was trying to influence the curriculum. While the state regularly sets education standards — the goals for what students should learn by what grade — decisions on what teaching materials and instructional methods are used in the classroom should be left to local school districts, they said.

Some educators have questioned whether the update is needed, arguing that South Dakota teachers are already doing a good job of teaching history and civics.

Sioux Falls School Board President Cynthia Mickelson took the governor's proposal as a criticism of teachers and their commitment to vigorous teaching of civics and history.

"Anyone who is worried about history/civics instruction should 1st visit SFschools," Mickelson wrote in a tweet on Jan. 12. "Our team and all educators have been put through the wringer and to now pile on them and say they are indoctrinating their students and not doing a good job is inexcusable."

The governor has added political fuel to the



Gov. Kristi Noem and other state and national leaders believe young Americans need a deeper knowledge of history and how government works in order to be exceptional citizens and to reach their pull potential in life. Photo: News Watch file

debate by blaming a lack of civics education in part for the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol. In a column she wrote in January, Noem decried the violence but argued that a lack of civics education was "the root cause" of the insurrection, without mentioning the role of Trump and his supporters in the attack. She also referred to the 2020 presidential election as "rigged" and has not backed off that claim when asked to clarify.

Noem has said that her goal for the civics and history initiative is to teach students that the United States is "the most unique nation in the history of the world" and to give all state residents the knowledge needed to "pursue their own American dream."

Ian Fury, spokesperson for Noem, declined a News Watch request to interview the governor and referred all questions about the civics and history initiative to the Department of Education, which he said is leading the effort to implement a program.

At this point, still very early in the initiative process, it is unclear who or what group will have the final say in what the content and new teaching materials will contain. No specific committee or panel has been created to make final calls on teaching materials or new historical resources.

Past civics/history efforts



Molly Rozum

Noem has supported efforts to improve civics education in the past. A bill she supported in 2019 to require that South Dakota students pass a civics exam in order to graduate was heavily debated before being killed by the state Senate.

Other South Dakota officials have attempted to ramp up civics education in the past without much lasting effect.

Dave Munson, a former Republican lawmaker and former mayor of Sioux Falls, backed an effort in 2014 to enhance civics education and require that public school students pass an exam similar to what immigrants must pass before becoming U.S. citizens. Munson said he supports the new effort to enhance civics and history education, but said that great care must be taken to remove politics or inherent bias of government leaders or individual educators from decisions on teaching materials. The

current polarized and highly politicized state of American government may make that more difficult than in the past, Munson said.

"If we're going to teach it, we have to teach it in an unbiased way, because it's hard to get the unvarnished version out there," he said. "You have to be very careful so both sides are brought out, and you're not trying to shove one version of history down somebody's mind."

Munson said he hopes educators will lead the discussion on developing the plan as opposed to the governor, elected officials or those from organizations with a political bent. "Every organization is getting more political all the time, and I wish we could get away from that and teach kids what both sides of the story are," he said.

Regardless of who suggests or proposes funding for a new teaching focus, and in spite of the polarized state of American politics and government, caution is always needed to ensure that truth and a multitude of perspectives form the pillars of any new history-teaching plan, said Molly Rozum, a history professor at the University of South Dakota.

Rozum said those who guide classroom teaching should create content that highlights greater complexity rather than oversimplification of events in the past.

"It's always an inherent risk, and you don't want it to be 'political' or from a particular perspective, and I would be concerned about that whenever a process like this occurs," Rozum said. "I think you have to include multiple perspectives on events, look through different eyes, and create a layering of complications and complexities to be truthful about historical events."

The public should understand that the new civics and history initiative is not trying to create an entirely new curriculum for South Dakota schools, said Jaqueline Sly, a former Republican lawmaker from Rapid City who now chairs the state Board of Education Standards.

Instead, she said the initiative will provide more resources for teachers and make it easier for them to obtain the tools they need to teach history in more vibrant, relevant ways.

"It's not like throwing out the baby with the bathwater; it's taking what we have and working to strengthen it and make it better," Sly said. "We'll provide them with ways to make history come alive."

Sly also noted that the effort to improve civics and history education in South Dakota has been ongoing for years, and that whatever comes from the new initiative will be optional for schools to use if they see fit.

"It won't be top-down where you have to use this," Sly said. "But why not have this be the time to look if there are ways to strengthen our social studies teaching in South Dakota?"

Native American perspectives

Most educators and historians agree that it is critical that any new teaching resources in South Dakota provide a fair, realistic approach to the experiences of Native Americans, the state's largest minority group.

Noem's proposal for a new focus on state history and civics comes during a tenure in which she has sparred with leaders in the South Dakota Native American community. Noem threatened to sue tribes over highway checkpoints designed to protect tribal residents from COVID-19, and she was banned from the Pine

Continues on next page

Ridge Indian Reservation for about six months in 2019 after pushing a so-called riot-boosting law aimed at pipeline protesters.

State Sen. Troy Heinert, D-Mission, said it is critical that elected officials and politicians stay out of the process of choosing materials for schools or leading the new civics and history initiative.

"Anytime we start down this path, we have to be cautious of who's bringing it and asking if what they are promoting is accurate," said Heinert, a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe who is minority leader in the Senate. "I know that the governor and Legislature are not supposed to write curriculum; that scares me on the face of it."

Heinert said that he reviewed some civics exams that asked students to choose from a list of answers about what the United States gained when it made the Louisiana Purchase of land from France in 1803. The purchase put a large swath of land under American government control, including almost all of South Dakota and the western half of North Dakota, where Native Americans were the dominant population at the time.

"For far too long, history and civics have been a one-sided affair," said Heinert, who was a public school teacher for a decade. "From our perspective, the question is, What did we as a people lose in the Louisiana Purchase, and the fact that we were not even made aware of what was happening?"

Jace DeCory, a Lakota elder and educator who is a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, said any committee that determines the content of expanded history teaching in South Dakota must have input from several Native Americans in order to present a full picture of state history.

DeCory, who is a professor emeritus in the American Indian Studies Program at Black Hills State University, said education in Native American history and issues has improved but remains inadequate in South Dakota K-12 schools.

"Some of these kids coming from high schools in South Dakota, a lot of things we talk about in our history, they couldn't believe and they were like deer in the headlights," said DeCory, who taught history for more than 30 years at the college level. "In this day and age, you think our young people would have learned something about Wounded Knee, the Battle of Sand Creek, the Trail of Tears, some of these major events that occurred throughout the nation."

Without learning the truth about Native history, including the boarding-school experience that stripped thousands of Natives of their language and culture, South Dakota students will be unable to understand some of the historical trauma and other challenges that still face indigenous people today, DeCory said.

"I think it's important because I want to know the truth, I want them to know the truth, even though the truth hurts sometimes," DeCory said.

DeCory said she is happy that the South Dakota social studies standards include the option for schools to teach the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings and Standards, which provides content on Native history, culture and land use. But she is hopeful the new civics and history program will provide greater opportunities and incentives for South Dakota schools to infuse lessons about Native Americans into all subjects. Learning more about Native history and culture will benefit students throughout their lives, she said.

"As Native people, we have been here for thousands of years, and yet there are many folks that don't know about us, our history and our cultural beliefs," she said. "I think especially during times of stress and whatnot, we offer something as Lakota people to the rest of the world. I really believe that our traditional way of life is a gift from the Creator, and those

of us who believe in those traditional beliefs are trying to make the world a better place."

Waiting and seeing



Rhoda Bryan

Officials in some school districts contacted by News Watch appeared reluctant to discuss the civics and history initiative.

DeeAnn Konrad, spokeswoman for the Sioux Falls School District, said the district had no comment on the initiative since the contents of the program have not yet been developed.

"Our schools teach with fidelity the content standards outlined by the state which can be found on the DoE website," Konrad wrote to News Watch in an email.

Katy Urban, spokeswoman for the Rapid City Area Schools, said the district is also waiting to see what comes out of the initiative but noted that teachers in the district feel they already do a good job of teaching to the state social studies standards.

"The state dictates what we teach, so it's always been led by the state," Urban said. "It was interesting when this came forward because it was stuff our teachers already thought we were covering pretty well, so it will be interesting to see what is included when that is developed."

Rhoda Bryan, a history teacher who is the head of the Social Studies Department at Central High School in Rapid City, said she feels that South Dakota students are receiving a good education in civics and history now.

But Bryan said she welcomes a greater focus on those topics, especially at a time when many teachers and students have been urged to spend more time on STEM topics, or science, technology, engineering and math.

"I feel like we do a really great job in what we do right now, but as a social studies teacher, if there is more funding or resources or more focus, I'm always going to be a supporter of that," Bryan said. "I think that social studies are just as important as the three other core areas of English, math and science because these students are learning to become citizens."

Bryan, a Missouri native who has taught for seven years, said she is not overly concerned that bias or political leanings will enter into the creation of a new civics and history program for South Dakota schools.

"I don't really see new standards or a new program changing the content that we teach all that much," she said. Social studies teachers, she said, are already skilled at leaving personal feelings out of the conversations in the classroom.

Bryan often poses to her students a daily question to spur them to think about the world around them. Sometimes the question will refer to current events, but the larger focus is to prompt students to consider how current events relate to history and to understand the modern by placing it in the context of the historical.

For example, a daily question about the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 would ultimately blend into lessons about the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, Bryan said. Similarly, Bryan used the 2020 presidential election as a way to discuss the First Amendment, its roots and its application in modern society, rather than examining the election from a horse-race or political-party perspective.

"Whichever side of the aisle people are on, they may not realize that history and government teachers are not really here teaching current events," Bryan said. "It's not that we don't draw comparisons to today, but we see it as more that we're teaching the past and what happened in history."

Data from several studies and standardized tests make it clear that American youths and

adults do not have a deep understanding of history, civics and the workings of government.

A 2016 survey by the Annenberg Public Policy Center found that only 26% of Americans could name the three branches of government. That year, only 23% of eighth graders scored as proficient on the National Assessment of Educational Programs civics exam. NAEP scores show that student scores across the country fell from 2014 to 2018 in history, civics and geography, though there were some improvements compared with tests taken in 1994.

Potential benefits of social studies



Ben Jones

Ben Jones, state historian and director of the State Historical Society who served two years as state secretary of education, said the political climate in the country at any given time is mostly considered by educators to be "noise" that does not play into decisions on revising or creating educational initiatives.

"Nothing will be improved by waiting to do this," Jones said. "If you look at the national scores for history and civics, they're nothing to be proud of."

Jones said South Dakota and the country would benefit from enhancing civics and history education because doing so will teach students about their rights and responsibilities as citizens and provide them with context on how those rights came to be.

"It's been a concern since the framers, because a republic doesn't work if the citizenry doesn't know what their rights are," Jones said. "Hopefully, you're inspiring them to once in a while pick up a book about their country and read something about Abraham Lincoln or the Underground Railroad or Wounded Knee and have some curiosity about the history that is embedded within them."

Rozum, the USD history professor, said she would like to see instruction in South Dakota history taught beyond the fourth grade, where most state history curricula end or taper off. Students are taught more about U.S. and world history as they progress into high school, according to the current state standards.

Rozum said the teaching of history at any age is a critical element of the successful development of people as individuals and as members of a vibrant, collective society.

"You don't just learn facts," she said. "There's a skill set needed to learn history, including analytics, writing, communicating effectively and understanding the complexity of the world. People who know history have a higher quality of life because you can engage in the world around you in a much more complicated way."

In general, Rozum is hopeful about what might result from the process to develop a new civics and history initiative in South Dakota.

"That's one of the great things about the United States; we can look at our past mistakes and then reform and revise and do better," she said. "We can be critical of things that happened in the past in order to perfect Democracy in the present and move forward, and that should not be stunted in any way."

ABOUT BART PFANKUCH



Bart Pfankuch, Rapid City, S.D., is the content director for South Dakota News Watch. A Wisconsin native, he is a former editor of the Rapid City Journal and also worked at newspapers in Florida. Bart has spent more than 30 years as a reporter, editor and writing coach.

The Friendship between Arthur C. Mellette and Samuel Elrod

South Dakota might have had a different fifth governor if not for its first governor.

In 1882, Samuel Elrod of Indiana was looking for a place to start his law practice after earning his law degree from Asbury College in Greencastle, Ind., now known as DePauw University.

He wrote Arthur C. Mellette, a member of the same college fraternity and also a native of Indiana, about the opportunities for a young attorney in Dakota Territory. Mellette, his wife Maggie and their four sons had arrived in Springfield, Dakota Territory, in 1878, seeking a better climate for Maggie's health. Mellette served as registrar of the United States Land Office until it was moved to Watertown in 1880. The Mellette family also moved to Watertown, where Arthur soon became a prosperous attorney and leading citizen.

Mellette encouraged Elrod to come to Dakota Territory and invited him to come to Watertown and stay with the Mellettes.

Elrod arrived in Watertown on July 2, 1882, according to John Timm of Sioux Falls, who has written about the Mellettes and portrayed Mellette in living history re-enactments.

Mellette met Elrod at the train depot, and they spent the afternoon getting acquainted.

Two days later, the nearby town of Clark celebrated the arrival of the first passenger train to that community as well as the first Independence Day of the town's existence. One of the speakers at the festivities was Elrod, who was substituting for Mellette.

Elrod decided to establish a law practice in Clark.

According to a manuscript written by Maggie Mellette, the Mellettes received a letter from Elrod saying he was not well.

"As it was his first winter in Dakota, we thought him homesick, so we sent for him to come over to spend a few days with us. Each day he grew worse and the doctor pronounced it typhoid fever. A nurse was not to be had and there was not a house in town to which he could be sent. Duty was plain, the sick man must be cared for," Maggie wrote.

To safeguard her own health, Maggie took a train back to Indiana for a visit.

"Mr. Mellette was installed as nurse. In a week a telegram brought Mr. Elrod's father and together they brought the sick man back to life," Maggie wrote.

Elrod's father took him back to Indiana, where he made a complete recovery, according to Timm. There, several law firms in Indianapolis invited Elrod to join them, but he declined them all in favor of returning to Clark. Before leaving Indiana, Elrod proposed marriage to Mary Ellen Masten and she accepted. Elrod then left for Dakota Territory, but returned to Indiana in the fall of 1884 and married Mary Ellen on Nov. 11, 1884. They returned to Clark to begin their married life. They had two children: a daughter, Barbara, and a son, Arthur Mellette Elrod.

"Elrod always credited Mellette with saving his life. He named his son after Mellette," Timm said.

Mellette went on to be appointed the last governor of Dakota Territory and was elected the first governor of South Dakota, in office from 1889 to 1893. He died on May 25, 1896.

Elrod was elected South Dakota's fifth governor, serving from 1905-1907. During his term as governor, Elrod initiated construction of the Capitol building in Pierre and acquired land in Huron to serve as the permanent fairgrounds for the South Dakota State Fair. He adopted more aggressive railroad regulations, enacted reforms at the state penitentiary and limited state expenditures.

Elrod and members of the Mellette family maintained contact with each other after Ar-



Arthur C. Mellette (right photo) saved Samuel Elrod's (left photo) life. A slightly different account of Arthur becoming ill and Mellette nursing him back to health is contained in "Over a Century of Leadership" by Lynwood E. Oyos. That version was told by one of the Mellettes' sons. However, John Timm, who has told the story in re-enactments of Mellette, draws on version written by Maggie Mellette. This document is used as the basis of the story about Elrod's bout with typhoid.

thur's death.

The South Dakota State Historical Society – State Archives contains correspondence Elrod wrote to members of the Mellette family. In a letter dated Oct. 24, 1926, Elrod updated Mag-

SOUTH DAKOTA
HISTORY & HERITAGE

gie Mellette about his family. Daughter Barbara was married and living in Vermillion. Son Arthur saw service in France during World War I and was diagnosed with tuberculosis of the spine after returning home. Arthur joined his father in practicing law in Clark. Elrod's wife, Mary Ellen, was not in good health.

"She often talks about you and your kindnesses to us," Elrod wrote.

Other letters tell of meeting the Mellettes' son, Charley, and Charley's daughter, at the 1928 Republican National Convention in Kansas City, Mo., and expressed sorrow at the death of the youngest Mellette son, Joshua Theodore Richard, nicknamed Dick, in 1929.

"I have never forgotten you and yours," Elrod stated in one letter to Maggie.

Elrod died on July 13, 1935.

This moment in South Dakota history is provided by the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation, the nonprofit fundraising partner of the South Dakota State Historical Society at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. Find us on the web at www.sdhsf.org. Contact us at info@sdhsf.org to submit a story idea.

-30-

From the Editors of
E - The Environmental
Magazine

EARTHTALK

Dear EarthTalk:

What are the environmental pros and cons of so many of us relying on GPS apps (Waze, Google Maps, etc.) to get around these days?
-- B. Rogers,
Newark, NJ

It's hard to measure whether having GPS apps on our smartphones is positive or negative for the planet, but some environmentalists are skeptical. Indeed, the rise of Waze, Google Maps, Inrix and other apps that respond to live traffic data to reroute drivers accordingly—not to mention the concomitant proliferation of app-following Uber and Lyft drivers—has turned millions of formerly main-route-following drivers into sneaky shortcut seekers. Formerly quiet peaceful neighborhoods may never be the same again.

On the plus side, the widespread use of these apps saves individual drivers some time and may slightly reduce the amount of time we all spend burning extra fuel by idling in congested traffic. But the data on this is mixed and warrants further research.

While you may have gotten to work three minutes faster this morning, what was the cost? Neighborhoods everywhere are miffed at the proliferation of cars racing through formerly quiet back streets to circumvent the latest highway logjam. The problem has been especially noticeable in already car-crazed Los Angeles, where neighborhood streets filled up with traffic once Waze hit the market in 2011 and started alerting Angelinos of the fastest, least congested routes to and fro. As more and more drivers followed Waze's directions, the app sent them deeper and deeper into formerly forlorn byways. With Google Maps, Inrix and others following Waze's lead, the problem has only gotten worse in recent years.

Research out of the University of California's Institute of Transportation Studies (ITS) concludes that while GPS apps are helping individuals get from point A to B faster, they are also making congestion worse overall. ITS's traffic simulations show how freeway flow changes in response to an accident when no drivers use GPS apps versus when 20 percent of drivers have them activated. With more app-using drivers, congestion builds up at off-ramps and traffic on the highway slows. "The situation then gets much worse because hundreds of people just like you want to go on the side streets, which were never designed to handle the traffic," says ITS director Alexandre Bayen. "So, now, in addition to congesting the freeway, you've also congested the side streets and the intersections."

Critics of these apps blame the software designers—not us consumers just trying to get to and from work or the grocery store—for the negative effects on traffic flows and neighborhood peace. If the apps are so smart, why can't they disperse drivers onto different routes and away from back streets and quiet neighborhoods to smartly reduce congestion overall? To wit, later this year Google Maps will start routing drivers to the most fuel-efficient route—not necessarily the fastest—to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and save drivers money in fuel costs. If the greener route is significantly slower than another way, the app will give users the option to choose for themselves, but at least this move is a nod to how much greenhouse gas busting power a little bit of code on your phone can have to help save the planet.

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Climate feminists march outside international climate talks in Poland in December 2018. Credit: Greenpeace.

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East Hanson Opt-Out Notice

ATTENTION TAX PAYERS
Notice of Property Tax Increase of \$30,000.

The Governing Board of East Hanson do state that the above said board is unable to operate under the tax limitation measure currently in statute. We therefore OPT OUT of such tax limitation in the amount of \$30,000 starting with the calendar year 2021 taxes payable in the calendar year 2022. This opt out will be for 10 years, which will be through taxes payable in the year 2031. This action has been taken by the board and approved by at least a two-thirds vote of the board.

The decision may be referred to a vote of the people upon a petition signed by at least 5 percent of the registered voters in the district and filed with twenty days of the first publication.

Unless this action is referred to a vote of the people and reversed by such vote, this resolution authorizes the county auditor to spread an excess levy to raise tax dollars in the above stated amount.

Signed: Betty Schinkel, Clerk
(0414.0421)

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Lives Collide

Dawn. Golden-orange sunlight streamed from the east slamming into rugged buttes rising out of the prairie.

Strange to see so much beauty, to feel so much peace as my old Bronco lumbered to the scene of terrible misfortune. Duck, my Brittany Spaniel, had his nose buried in the can of pet food and didn't seem to notice.

I arrived at the ranch an hour early, and a woman came to the door. I introduced myself, we discussed the weather and she invited me in.

The house was small and homey. Breakfast was on the table and Lucille invited me to share. Coffee would be fine.

I waited until they were through before I asked any questions about the crash. Until then, we shared personal information-the kinds of things only residents of the plains can talk about within minutes of meeting. Wilmer and Lucille had three grandchildren. I was going to be a father for the first time. Years separated us. Tragedy had brought us together.

Outside, just half a mile away in a stubble field, the crumpled plane lay, and I almost forgot about it as Wilmer talked of the new calf he'd brought into the world. He spoke slowly, a rich dignified voice, his eyes betraying the strain of many calving seasons. It had been a hard week. The road washed out yesterday. But he got it filled in. Then the pipe to the water tank burst, and it had taken until 10 pm last night to get the damage repaired. Muddied hip boots dried in the porch.

And then there had been the awful discovery of the man and the plane. He must have been about Wilmer's age. For three weeks the wreckage lay so close but undiscovered.

Wilmer told me what he knew about the crash as I scribbled in the notebook. Just the facts...So antiseptic...

The son of the pilot would be here today, they said. My news story was someone else's family nightmare.

Wilmer spoke by radio with his son, 20 miles away, on another ranch. Two sleepy-eyed, bone-tired ranchers, discussing new calves and long hours. Interminable pauses separated the transmissions. Pauses that are only comfortable around family or close friends.

"I've got a reporter here," Wilmer said.

Pause.

A long pause.

Very long.

"Uh huh," said the son finally.

I hadn't noticed Lucille patiently waiting at the table. In her hands was a tattered black Bible. Three strips of silver duct tape held the cover together.

Wilmer waited patiently as I rattled on inane about this and that. When I gave him a pause he said, "It's time for our morning devotional."

"You're welcome to join us," Lucille invited.

I would.

It was mighty fine praying. Lucille went first and she prayed for family. She prayed for friends. She prayed humbly and so sincerely. She prayed for me, "our friend, who has joined us." She asked for a blessing on my wife and for the one on the way.

I was touched.

A little choked up.

A little teary eyed.

I croaked out a thank you when she had finished. I had come seeking calamity and had been offered salvation.

When Wilmer began his prayer from his rocker, it startled me. "To get to the truth...may we live, honor and appreciate all you do for us." Here was a man dead tired at dawn, a man who had faced a trying week, and he thanked God for it all. And he meant it.

"We think about the son that we will meet today," Lucille prayed. "Would you have your hand upon them today?"

God was surely listening.

I thanked them again, for sharing the moment. "We always invite people to stay. Some walk outside," she said. And then she smiled, a stray grey hair fell onto her forehead. "I'm glad you stayed."

At the crash site, the investigator was officious. From Chicago. But as we talked, he warmed up. He spoke of the sadness his job entails. But there was a lot of good in his life, too. There were the people he met. And the Prairie City Café had good food.

He gazed at the miles and buttes. He had been an artist. "It's so surreal. I know why you people live here," he said.

Then he seemed to remember Chicago.

"Don't ever leave," he ordered.

As I drove away, I thought about the grief-stricken son who would soon arrive. But I knew he'd be in good hands.

Like planes tumble from the sky, lives collide in the most unpredictable manner. An old man from Nebraska, a man we would never meet, had brought strangers together.

I drove by a church on the way home.

I drove by a school.

I had already been there.



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The show choir performed several selections at the end of the POPS Concert.



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