



2022 SD Jr Snow Queen Court

- 1st Runner Up: Jr Miss Langford, Jordis Jenner
- 2nd runner up: Jr Miss Wolsey-Wessington, Tatum Luce
- 2022 SD Jr Snow Queen: Jr Miss Faulkton, Amelia Currington
- 3rd runner up: Jr Miss Groton, Gretchen Dinger
- 4th runner up: Jr Miss Clark, Samantha Brenden
- Miss Congeniality: Jr Miss Watertown, Katie Leadabrand
- 2022 SD Snow Prince: Ramsey Skinner
- 2022 SD Snow Princess: Madelyn Crossley

(Photo from Official South Dakota Snow Queen Festival Facebook Page)



Bisbee takes second at state Junior Talent Show
Anna Bisbee took second place in the Jr talent at the SD Junior Snow Queen contest. (Courtesy Photo)



Groton Dynamics Dance Team

The Groton Dynamics Dance Team performed at halftime of the boys basketball game with Webster. This photo is lifted from the GDILIVE.COM video.

UpComing Events

Thursday, Jan. 13
Boys' Basketball at Aberdeen Roncalli. at Elementary Gym: 7th grade game at 4 p.m., 8th grade game at 5 p.m. at Roncalli High School: C game at 5 p.m. followed by junior varsity and varsity.

Friday, Jan. 14
Silver Bowl Debate at Sioux Falls
No School - Faculty In-Service at Warner School
6 p.m.: Girls' Basketball hosts Aberdeen Roncalli. JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity.

Saturday, Jan. 15
Silver Bowl Debate at Sioux Falls
Boys Basketball Classic at Redfield. Groton Area vs. Deubrook at 7:30

10 a.m.: Junior High boys basketball jambo-ree in Groton with Aberdeen Christian, Britton-Hecla and Webster Area.
10 a.m.: Wrestling at Potter County (Gettysburg) Invitational.

Monday, Jan. 17
Junior High Wrestling Invitational at Redfield
Girls basketball hosting Langford Area (JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity)

Tuesday, Jan. 18
Wrestling Tournament at Hamlin
Junior High Boys Basketball at Mobridge. 7th at 4 p.m. followed by 8th grade game.
Junior High Wrestling Invitational at the Aberdeen Civic Arena, 4 p.m.
The Junior High boys basketball game in Groton scheduled for Jan. 18th is cancelled.
City Council Meeting at 7 p.m.

Thursday, Jan. 20
Girls Basketball at Clark/Willow Lake. JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity.

Friday, Jan. 21
Debate Speech Fiesta at Watertown High School
Boys Basketball hosting Clark/Willow Lake. 7th grade at 4 p.m., 8th grade at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity game.
Wrestling Dual at Deuel High School, 6 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 22
Debate Speech Fiesta at Watertown High School
Wrestling Tournament at Arlington, 10 a.m.

Monday, Jan. 24
Boys Basketball at Northwestern. 7th at 3:30, 8th at 4:30, C at 5:15, then JV and Varsity to follow.; Wrestling at Ipswich, 6 p.m.

Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

This roller coaster of a Vikings' season finally came to an end today as the team faced off against the lowly Chicago Bears. With both teams already eliminated from the playoffs, today's game was more about records, contract incentives, and draft position, than it was about the 60-year-old rivalry between the two teams.

First Half

The first half for the Vikings was by far their worst half of football all season. The Vikings' defense was unable to force the Bears to punt at any point as the Bears' offense crossed into Vikings' territory on every one of their drives. Nonetheless, thanks to a couple of DJ Wonnum sacks, the Vikings' defense was able to hold the Bears to only two field goals. However, per usual, the Vikings' defense struggled in the final 2:00 of the half, giving up a late touchdown to extend the Bears' lead to 14-0. For the 2021 season, the Vikings have given up a total 128 points in the final 2:00 of either half, an NFL record.

The offense did absolutely nothing for most of the half as Kirk Cousins faced endless pressure from a Bears defensive line missing two of its starters: Khalil Mack and Akiem Hicks. It was only until their final drive of the half that the Vikings' offense came alive. Cousins was able to complete a 25-yard pass to Justin Jefferson, and a 40-yard pass to Ithmir Smith-Marsette on back-to-back plays, which gave the Vikings the ball on the Bears 11-yard line with 0:13 remaining. However, the chance for the Vikings to get a much-needed touchdown was quickly negated by a holding call on Oli Udoh. The Vikings would settle for a field goal and send the team into halftime down 14-3.

Second Half

The second half was a lot more exciting to watch for Vikings fans. Kirk Cousins, in what may be his last game as the Vikings' quarterback, completed three touchdown passes to three different wide receivers: a 44-yarder to Ithmir Smith-Marsette, a 45-yarder to Justin Jefferson, and a 21-yarder to KJ Osborn.

The Viking's defense also showed up big in the second half, intercepting Bears' quarterback Andy Dalton twice and even getting the Bears to finally punt. Patrick Peterson finally got his first interception as a Minnesota Viking and even put an exclamation point on it by returning it for a touchdown. After being down 14-3 at halftime, the Vikings suddenly saw themselves with a 31-17 lead with 4:54 remaining in the game.

The final minutes of the game for Vikings fans at US Bank Stadium was spent yelling at the team to get Justin Jefferson the ball one more time. Jefferson came into today's game needing 123 receiving yards to break Randy Moss' franchise record of 1,632 receiving yards in a season. Sadly, Jefferson was unable to break the record as he fell just 17 yards short, finishing the season at 1,616 receiving yards. It is important to note that Jefferson now is the only wide receiver in NFL history to have eclipsed 3,000 total receiving yards through his first two seasons.

Final Score: Vikings 31 – Bears 17. Vikings finish the season 8-9.

Final Thoughts

Rumors around the NFL indicate that Mike Zimmer will likely not be the Vikings' head coach next year. If these rumors turn out to be true, the Vikings will be starting fresh with a new head coach for the first time in nearly eight years. Although Zimmer never led the Vikings to a Super Bowl, Zimmer's success during his tenure as the Vikings' head coach cannot be understated. When he became the Vikings' head coach in 2014, the team had the lowest-ranked defense in the NFL. That quickly changed under Zimmer and by 2017, the Vikings became the best defense in the NFL. However, lately, the defense has struggled, and it is probably time for the Vikings to find a new head coach.

Furthermore, this may be the last game for several Vikings players as well. Anthony Barr, Danielle Hunter, Kirk Cousins, and Patrick Peterson all have contracts that will give the Vikings organization tough decisions on what to do with them.

Post traumatic radio syndrome

Ask any old disc jockey if they ever have the "dead air dream" and they'll all tell you they do. Or used to. In those frenetic studios, especially if you were doing mornings, you were ripping the AP news wire, prerecording programs, and answering the phone (because for the first couple of hours, you were the only one in the building) while trying to keep records cued up and sounding chipper. It was weird. For years, the first words I spoke each day were into a microphone.

Invariably, with all the distractions, the record would begin to fade, and you'd scramble to the microphone while dropping the needle on the next 45. Sometimes, you were too late and even a second or two of radio silence was the greatest sin one could commit. And I was the king of dead air.

Thus, the dream.

You'd be sleeping and it would be too quiet, so you would instinctively jerk awake. I used to have them all the time, even years after I quit the business. Post-traumatic radio syndrome. I haven't had one for a long time, but that's what startled me into consciousness in the wee hours this morning. And I haven't been in radio for 31 years. It's kinda Pavlovian.

Snowy days were the worst because the phone rang incessantly. Every hopeful kid in the region would call: "Is there school today?" One after the other after the other after the other... You'd want to scream, "Listen to the radio!" My buddy Bob Booker once recorded three minutes of the calls and played them back to illustrate the stupidity of the KQDJ listening audience. Radio has a way of making you crazy, and when he quit, I got his old job.

I did terrible things, for instance, during a swap and shop segment, I fielded a call from a sweet old lady with a thick German accent announcing her "crotch sale." Oh, I asked, was it a big crotch? And did she have a lot of stuff in her crotch? So we spent about five minutes discussing her crotch much to the horror of the weasel salesman who sold sponsorships on the program. In my defense, the woman was quite proud of her crotch. She insisted there were no mice in there.

We churned through four general managers in my three years in Jamestown, ND, and each time, Tim Ost, my roommate and program director, and I would hold up new management for a raise. This blackmail went on until they hit the bottom of the barrel and made The Weasel the new GM. He said no to the raise. Putz.

To make matters worse, he devised a holiday promotion that was the dumbest thing ever. We were supposed to call people indiscriminately out of the phone book and if they answered, "Merry Christmas!" they'd win—get this—a two-liter bottle of Coke. Of course, this would be hugely embarrassing because no one's gonna do that, I argued vociferously, but the greasy comb-over genius insisted. Embarrassingly, we did a big advertising build up. God, it was lame.

As the morning man, I was to launch the contest at about 7:15 and get egg on my face. As the time approached, I watched through the windows of the studios as the whole staff scrambled to their desks to listen to see what I'd do. I made a huge insincere deal about it, extolling the virtues of Coca-Cola and the greatness of any radio station that would give such a fine Christmas gift away.

Ring. Ring. A meek, shaky, female voice answered. "Hello?"

"YOU LOSE!" I screamed into the microphone.

When he fired me, The Weasel said, "Tony, we're going to have to let you go..."

"I suppose a raise is out of the question."

My favorite radio gig was in Juneau, Alaska, where management embraced my obnoxiousness because it was good for ratings. We also did a lot of community service which is how I got roped into doing a show with the Alaska Highway Patrol to illustrate the perils

of drinking and driving. I was supposed to steadily drink a bottle of Wild Turkey at the mall and they would test my reaction time every 20 minutes or so on a mock car set-up. The thing is, I kept getting faster. And faster. And faster, still. Because I'm a gamer. By the time the show was over, I'd set all kinds of records. Pretty good show, too.



That's Life

by Tony Bender

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Sisseton girls edge Groton Area in overtime

Sisseton pulled out a 57-52 overtime win over Groton Area in girls basketball action played Friday in the Groton Area Arena.

Sisseton held a 16-8 lead after the first quarter and a 27-21 lead at half time. The Tigers rallied to take a 28-27 lead and the lead changed hands three more times before the Redmen would settle in with a 40-38 lead after the third quarter. Groton Area held a 49-47 with 1:26 left in the fourth quarter. Hannah Levenson would make an inside shot with 15 seconds left to tie the game at 49, sending the game into overtime.

Sisseton would score first in the overtime and the Tigers tied the game at 51, but Sisseton would take advantage of four Groton Area turnovers in the overtime and went on for the win.

Gracie Traphagen had another double-double night with 21 points, 16 rebounds, one assist and two steals. Jerica Locke had seven points, one rebound and one assist. Sydney Leicht had six points, three rebounds, one assist and one steal. Allyssa Locke had five points, two rebounds, three assists and one steal. Aspen Johnson had four points, four rebounds, two assists and four steals. Kennedy Hansen had four points and one rebound. Alyssa Thaler had two points, three rebounds, two assists, one block and one steal. Brooke Gengerke had two points and two assists. Jaedyn Penning had one point and two rebounds.

Groton Area made 10 of 23 field goals for 43 percent, five of 18 in three-pointers for 28 percent, made 17 of 27 free throws for 63 percent, had 32 rebounds, 23 turnovers, 12 assists, nine steals, one block shot and 12 team fouls with Allyssa Locke fouling out.

Hannah Levensen led the Redmen with 21 points followed by Emmalee Nielsen with 12, Hailey Nelson 10, Tara Nelson eight, and adding two points apiece were Veronica Rice, Ruby Rice and Krista Langager. Sisseton made 20 of 51 field goals for 39 percent, six of eight free throws for 75 percent, had 11 turnovers and 20 team fouls.

Sisseton made nine three-pointers while Groton Area made five.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Bary Keith at Harr Motors, John Sieh Agency, Groton Ford, Dacotah Bank and Allied Climate Professionals with Kevin Nehls.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 26-25. Sisseton held a 9-2 lead after the first quarter, a 14-7 lead at half time, and a 23-16 lead at the end of the third quarter. The Tigers chipped away at the lead in the fourth quarter and took its first lead with 3:34 left in the game at 24-23. Kennedy Hansen propelled the Tigers with six fourth quarter points and the Tigers were four of five from the line in the final period.

Brooklyn Hansen led the Tigers with seven points while Kennedy Hansen and Jerica Locke each had six, Elizabeth Flihs had five and Jaedyn Penning had two points.

Krista Langager led Sisseton with 13 points while Ruby Rice had five, Rylie Huff had three and Jourdes Chance and Linnea Silk each had two points.

The game was broadcast on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Tami and Rich Zimney.

The Tigers took command of the second half and won the C game, 37-19. The game was tied at nine after the first period and the Tigers held a 15-13 lead at half time. Groton Area outscored Sisseton, 13-3, in the third period to take a 28-16 lead at the break.

Faith Traphagen and Brooklyn Hansen each had nine points, Laila Roberts eight, Talli Wright and Mia Crank each had three, Kayla Lehr and Emily Clark each had two points and Elizabeth Flihs added a free throw.

Bella Donnel led Sisseton with four points while Kennedy Hanson, Harley Richards and Isabelle Herrick each had three points and Lauryn Wegener, Andra Hanson and Elliot Hortness each had two points.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Kent and Darcy Muller.

- Paul Kosel

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Aberdeen Christian girls use a 3-2-1 approach to beat Groton Area

Three-pointers, two-pointers and free throws all made for lethal weapons for Aberdeen Christian as the Knights defeated Groton Area in girls basketball action Tuesday in Groton, 55-38.

Free throws propelled the Knights in the first quarter as they made nine of 10 free shots to take a 16-7 lead at the end of the first quarter. Aberdeen Christian then upped its lead to 36-15 by half time and 43-23 by the end of the third quarter. The Knights made six three-pointers. The Tigers actually made more three-pointers than two-pointers.

Allyssa Locke led the Tigers, making four of seven three-pointers and having 12 points, three rebounds, one assist and three steals. Kennedy Hansen had eight points, one rebound and one assist. Gracie Traphagen had five points, nine rebounds and two assists. Alyssa Thaler had four points, four rebounds and one steal. Jaedyn Penning had four points and three rebounds. Brooklyn Hansen had three points. Jerica Locke had two points, one assist and one steal. Brooke Gengerke had two rebounds, two assist and one steal. Sydney Leicht had four rebounds and one assist. Aspen Johnson had three rebounds. Faith Traphagen had one rebound and one assist.

Groton Area made six of 22 field goals for 27 percent, seven of 26 three-pointers for 27 percent, made five of six free throws for 83 percent, had 30 rebounds, 13 turnovers, nine assists, six steals and 12 team fouls.

Aberdeen Christian was led by Mallory Miller with 18 points (scoring 16 of them in the first half), Kaylee Block had 11 points while Joy Rohrbach had seven, and Hanna Miller, Chloe Holt and Grace Kaiser each had six points.

The Knights made 18 of 42 field goals for 43 percent, 11 of 16 free throws for 68 percent, had 11 team fouls and nine turnovers.

Aberdeen Christian is now 7-0 on the season while the Tigers go to 4-5.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Dacotah Bank and Allied Climate Professionals with Kevin Nehls.

Groton Area's junior varsity team kept Aberdeen Christian scoreless in the second half as the Tigers won, 48-13. Groton Area held a 10-5 lead at the end of the first quarter, a 21-13 lead at half time and a 35-13 lead at the end of the third quarter.

Brooklyn Hansen led the Tigers with 13 points followed by Jerica Locke with seven, Faith Traphagen had six, Elizabeth Flihs and Mia Crank each had five, Kennedy Hansen and Riley Dunker each had four and Jaedyn Penning and Talli Wright each had two points.

Chloe Bosma led the Knights with six points while Sophia Fogarty had four, Bailey Englund two and Chloe Holt added one.

The junior varsity game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Ken & Teresa Roberts of Tonganoxie, KS.

- Paul Kosel

Platte-Geddes defeats Groton Area in girls hoop action

A 12-point run in the third quarter spelled trouble for the Lady Tigers as Platte-Geddes defeated Groton Area, 43-27.

The Black Panthers of Platte-Geddes never allowed the Tigers to lead, but it was close in the first half. Platte-Geddes jumped out to a 6-0 lead and held an 11-5 lead at the end of the first quarter. Groton Area rallied with seven straight points in the second quarter and closed to within one, 13-12. Groton Area had chances to take the lead but could not convert and Platte-Geddes held a 15-14 lead at half time.

The Black Panthers scored 12 unanswered points in the third quarter as cold shooting by the Tigers put them in a 31-20 deficit by the end of the third quarter.

Gracie Traphagen had yet another double-double game for the Tigers. With the held of seven of 10 free throws, Traphagen finished with 15 points and grabbed 12 rebounds. Traphagen had 10 points and nine rebounds in the first half when the Tigers were keeping up with Platte-Geddes.

Brooke Gengerke had four points in the fourth quarter and had one rebound and one assist. Alyssa Thaler made a three-pointer in the first quarter and had four rebounds and two steals. Jerica Locke had three points, one rebound and one assist. Sydney Leicht had two points, three rebounds and one assist.

The Tigers made eight of 32 field goals for 25 percent, made one of 14 three-pointers for 7 percent, eight of 16 free throws for 50 percent off of the Black Panther's 11 team fouls, had 12 turnovers, six assists, three steals and 14 team fouls.

Karly VanDerWerff led the Black Panthers with 13 points while Baleigh Nachtigal and Regan Hoffman each had nine, Hadley Hanson had eight and Cadence Van Zee added four points. Platte-Geddes made 15 of 43 total field goals for 35 percent, was 12 of 17 from the line for 71 percent, had 11 turnovers and 11 team fouls.

Groton Area is now 4-4 on the season while Platte-Geddes goes to 4-3.

The game was played as part of the Redfield Holiday classic and was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Dacotah Bank, John Sieh Agency, Groton Ford, Allied Climate Professionals with Kevin Nehls and Bary Keith from Harr Motors.

- Paul Kosel

Groton Area boys have clean sweep over Webster Area

Groton Area had a 17 point rally in the second quarter to put down Webster Area in boys basketball action, 64-38. The game was played Monday in Groton.

Groton Area held a 10 point lead early in the game and led 15-12 at the end of the first quarter. The Bearcats closed to within one, 17-16, before Groton Area rattled off 17 straight points and led at half time, 36-18. It was a 50-33 lead at the end of the third quarter.

Lane Tietz led the Tigers with 25 points, three rebounds, two assist and one steal. Tate Larson had 12 points, five rebounds, one assist and one steal. Jacob Zak had 11 points, four rebounds, three assists and three steals. Cole Simon had six points, two rebounds and two steals. Jayden Zak had two points, two rebounds, one assist and five steals. Kaden Kurtz had two points, five rebounds, one assist and four steals. Wyatt Hearnen had two points, one rebound, one steal and one block. Colby Dunker and Logan Ringgenberg each had two points and Cade Larson and Braxton Imrie each had one assist.

Groton Area made 25 of 49 in field goals for 51 percent, two of eight three-pointers for 25 percent, made eight of 11 in free throws for 78 percent, had 22 rebounds, seven turnovers, 10 assists, 17 steals, seven team fouls and one block shot.

Jaydon Keller led the Bearcats with 16 points while Jaiden McCreary and Jacob Pereboom each had seven points, Gavin Sannes had four, Caron Mount two and Tommy Vergeldt and Tayne Dunse each had one point.

Webster Area made 15 of 40 field goals for 38 percent, five of 11 from the line for 45 percent, had 17 turnovers and 15 team fouls.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Dacotah Bank, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Bary Keith at Harr Motors and Allied Climate Professionals with Kevin Nehls.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 45-20. The Tigers led at the quarterstops at 15-6, 30-8 and 43-12. Teylor Diegel led the Tigers with 13 points while Cole Simon had 10, Logan Ringgenberg and Holden Sippel each had eight points and Braxton Imrie and Colby Dunker each had three points.

Tommy Vergelat led Webster Area with 12 points while Martin Dorsett had four and Ian Lesnar two.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Molly and Mike Ringgenberg.

Groton Area made it a clean sweep with a 33-18 win of the C game. Blake Pauli led Groton Area with nine points while Turner Thompson and Keagan Tracy each had six, Ryder Johnson and Caden McInerney each had three points and adding two each were JD Schwan, Karter Moody and Logan Warrington.

- Paul Kosel

Kucker wins both matches at Groton Triangular

Korbin Kucker wrestled two matches and won both with a pin at the Groton triangular held Thursday night. Pierce Kettering and Brevin Flihs each won a match via forfeit in the Redfield match and both pinned their opponents during the Webster match. Liza Kruger wrestled one match in the girls division and she won via a pin.

In Redfield match, Porter Johnson, 113, was pinned by Conner Zens with 24 seconds left in the match, Isiah Schaeponiak was pinned by Jacob Fehlman in 21 seconds, Pierce Kettering at 132 and Brevin Flihs at 138 both won by forfeit, Christian Ehresmann, 145, was decisioned by Mason Whitley, 7-5; Korbin Kucker, 145, pinned Collin Dean in 20 seconds, Cole Bisbee, 160, was pinned by Mason Fey in 52 seconds; Lane Krueger, 220, pinned Gavin Nichols in 3:16, and Walker Zoellner, 106, was pinned by Brady Risetter in 1:49.

In the Webster match, Liza Krueger won her match by pin with one minute left in the match, Pierce Kettering, 132, pinned Blaise McGregor in seven seconds, Brevin Flihs, 138, pinned Gage Baumgarn in 3:49, Cameron Johnson was pinned by Cael Larson in 1:07, Christian Ehresmann, 152, pinned Gavin Witt in 1:02, Korbin Kucker, 160, pinned Cole Shoemaker in 55 seconds, Porter Johnson at 113, Cole Bisbee at 170 and Noah Voeller at 195 both won by forfeit, Lane Krueger, 220, was pinned by Caleb McGregor in 2:36, and Walker Zoellner, 106, was pinned by Tacey Miller in 3:31.

Team scores had Redfield beating Webster, 54-27, Redfield beating Groton Area, 57-24, and Groton Area beating Webster Area, 42-24.

The matches were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Dacotah Bank, Groton Ford, Mike-N-Jo's Body-N-Glass, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, the John Sieh Agency and Allied Climate Professionals with Kevin Nehls.

Groton Prairie Mixed

Jan. 5 Team Standings: Cheetahs 9 ½, Chipmunks 9, Jackelopes 6, Shih Tzus 4 ½, Foxes 4, Coyotes 3

Men's High Games: Lance Frohling 211, 201, Roger Spanier 196, Mike Siegler 195

Women's High Games: Lori Wiley 190, Vicki Walter 172, 166, Sue Stanley 165

Men's High Series: Lance Frohling 577, Mike Siegler 507, Roger Spanier 507

Women's High Series: Lori Wiley 478, Vicki Walter 474, Sue Stanley 442

South Dakota returns millions in unused housing assistance funds to federal government

By: Bart Pfankuch, SD Newswatch

South Dakota has sent millions of dollars of unused COVID-19 housing assistance funds — allocated to help low-income renters — back to the federal government, mainly because not enough people applied for help.

As of early January 2022, the state had received about \$271 million in federal funding to pay rent and utilities of low-income residents who fell behind during the pandemic. But so far, the state has distributed only about \$24.9 million to needy residents, or about 9.2% of the total available funding.

In September, South Dakota and other states that did not spend the money fast enough were required to return some of the money to the federal Treasury. That month, South Dakota returned about \$22 million in unused housing assistance funds to the federal government, which is reallocating the excess money to states that are using it faster.

Several other states, especially those in rural areas or with smaller populations, have had to return unused housing-assistance funds. Overall, the federal government said disbursing the money to low-income renters has gone more slowly than expected across the country. The program will continue to offer assistance at least until 2025.



South Dakota received \$271 million in federal funding to help renters remain in housing and keep landlords viable, but has given out only \$25 million so far. Renters in Minnehaha County and Pennington County, where this home is located, have applied in high numbers for help. Photo: News Watch file

renters and landlords who are being hurt by the pandemic.

authority assistance applications have been filed, mostly in rural or reservation counties. The most populous counties, Minnehaha and Pennington, led the way in overall applications filed.

“At the end of the day, hopefully everyone that needs assistance is able to get that, and I think \$25 million is a lot of money,” Polak said in an interview with News Watch. “It has been quite a process, but it’s been a great opportunity to provide the assistance to households that need it, and it’s been a great opportunity with our partner agencies to work on this with each other in a statewide effort.”

Federal funds form basis of programs

South Dakota has used three separate federal funding programs to assist with housing costs for low-income residents during the pandemic. Legislators in 2020 used a special session to approve using \$10 million in federal Cares Act funds to provide money for rent, mortgage payments and utility bills to renters and homeowners affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

Congress then approved two rounds of funding in 2020 and 2021 through the Emergency Rental Assistance program that set aside almost \$47 billion to aid renters in states, large cities, U.S. territories and on reservations. Homeowners were not included in the ERA program and tribes were excluded from the second round of ERA funding.

The money was given to states to distribute to landlords and owners of rental properties to support low-income residents with rent and utility payments. The goal was to help renters stay housed and assist landlords who operated under a federal eviction moratorium from September 2020 to August 2021.

In January 2021, the federal government estimated that U.S. renters overall were in arrears by at least \$20 billion and as much as \$57 billion, potentially putting millions of American renters—particularly in minority communities—at risk of eviction. The eviction moratorium and economic slowdown during the pandemic caused many landlords and building owners to suffer significant financial losses as renters struggled.

South Dakota received \$200 million in ERA-1 funds and \$61 million in ERA-2 funding. When added to the \$10 million appropriated by the Legislature in 2020, the state has received a total of \$271 million in Cares Act funding in housing assistance, the large bulk targeted at renters.

Six months into the ERA-1 program, the U.S. Treasury reported that only \$1.5 billion of the \$25 billion allocated, or about 5.8%, had been provided as rental and utility assistance across the country. Two months later, the amount had jumped to \$7.5 billion, or 30% of the total, still far below what Congress had intended.

In a report in May 2021, the Treasury noted that “while some state and local programs are increasingly reaching households in need, others lag far behind.”

In an October 2021 report, the Congressional Research Service noted that the low rate of expenditure of ERA-1 funds “has caused some to raise concerns about the effectiveness of the program in preventing evictions as eviction moratoriums end, and in addressing the backlog of rent and utility debt.”

Members of Congress have watched the



Lorraine Polak

Lorraine Polak, executive director of the South Dakota Housing Development Authority, which is administering the housing assistance program for the state, said the state had to return funds for several reasons. One was that Congress gave too much assistance money to the

state; another that less rental assistance was needed because South Dakota did not shut down its economy as some other states did early in the pandemic.

“South Dakota has been successful in getting ERA funding to the residents in need,” Polak wrote to News Watch in an email, referring to the federal Emergency Rental Assistance program. “Because our state didn’t shut down or require businesses to close, we had fewer requests for assistance than other states that took away people’s ability to provide for themselves. In addition, many of our residents are homeowners, and this program only applies to renters.”

Polak pointed out that with a population of under 1 million, and the assistance program limited to renters who qualify as low-income, there was no way the state could spend all \$271 million from the program, part of which extends into 2025.

“We had more funds than necessary to meet the needs in our state,” Polak wrote. “It was best to return those taxpayer dollars to the Treasury.”

To help implement the program in a fast and functional way, the housing authority enlisted local agencies across the state to aid in the application process and allocation of funds that were ultimately paid directly to landlords and owners of rental properties.

Officials with two of those agencies said that while the program could have been run better, and likely could have helped more people, they said Polak did a good job managing the program and that the state continues to help



Peter Smith

“The state and all the partners have been wonderful to work with, and we’ve all gone to great lengths to help a lot of people,” said Peter Smith, executive director of the Rural Office of Community Services in Wagner, which provides a variety of aid to residents throughout eastern South Dakota.

“There’s a lot of stuff going on here that is beautiful, things that you don’t see.”

Smith said his team has sometimes driven long distances to hand-deliver assistance checks to landlords so renters could avoid eviction. He said the partnerships among local aid agencies and with the state housing authority have been strengthened as a result of the collaborative effort to run the housing program.

While those involved in administering the program see room for improvement — mostly by encouraging more people to apply and potentially expanding it to homeowners — many state housing officials view the program as largely successful in helping people maintain housing.

Polak said the state program has provided aid to about 4,000 households statewide, and Smith said his agency has aided about 1,350 families in 22 South Dakota counties.

“I would say the efficacy of the program has been excellent,” Smith said.

Some housing advocates and members of Congress have expressed concerns that some renters in the U.S. who need help due to the pandemic are not getting it, and that states need to do more to allocate the aid where needed.

The program’s challenges underscore the difficulty that federal, state and local governments have faced in distributing pandemic-assistance funds to those who need help in a timely, well-managed way that limits fraud and abuse.

State data show that in 21 of the 66 counties in South Dakota, fewer than 10 housing

Continued from previous page

program progress and some have expressed concern that the assistance is not being distributed in a timely fashion.

"There's no question that the funds aren't reaching landlords and renters quickly enough," U.S. Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., said during a House committee meeting on the ERA program in September 2021.

Some states were slow to implement systems to distribute the assistance, and some renters complained the paperwork requirements were too extensive or required computers and online proficiency. The Treasury reduced some paperwork requirements in ERA-2 compared with the first round of funding. ERA-1 assistance will end in 2022 but ERA-2 funds can be allocated through 2025.

However, as some states continued to lag in allocating assistance money, the Treasury in September 2021 enacted a "recapture and reallocation" process that required states that were not providing assistance fast enough to return money to the federal government, which likely will go to states with greater need or more efficient delivery systems.

For South Dakota, that resulted in the return of \$22 million in housing assistance funds in September 2021, and more could be returned this spring, Polak said.

North Dakota, where about \$15 million in assistance has been provided so far, officials have said the state expects to return \$149 million of the \$200 million it received in ERA-1 funding.

According to a South Dakota Housing Authority report in January 2022, about 3,800 households statewide had received some federal housing assistance, while about 1,850 applications were abandoned after being started.

Polak said it is impossible to identify why some people dropped out of the application process, as applicants perhaps returned to work, moved out of state or found the process too burdensome.

South Dakota housing officials twice asked the federal government for flexibility to spend unused rental assistance funds on programs such as those to build new affordable housing, but were rejected both times, Polak said.

U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-S.D., said in an email to News Watch that he supports letting states use ERA funding in other areas if they aren't able to spend it all on rental assistance.

"The Biden Administration flooded states with cash and they can't spend this money fast enough," Johnson wrote. "I'd like flexibility for states to spend unused dollars on things like roads and bridges before [C]ongress considers even more inflationary deficit spending."

Improvements suggested as program goes on

Some states hired private contractors to administer the program, but South Dakota handled allocation of funds through the South Dakota Housing Development Authority, an arm of state government.

The authority, which typically works with developers and other established housing partners, was immediately tasked with developing a complex new system to provide direct financial assistance to landlords, Polak said.

The housing authority enlisted the help of several local aid agencies across the state to let low-income residents know about the program and to administer the first steps in applying. Local agencies also played a key role in getting approved funding directly to landlords.

The housing authority was aggressive in trying to get the word out about the availability of assistance, Polak said, posting information on the agency website, working with local aid agencies to inform their clients of the opportunity for help, and providing notification through utility companies, daycare providers



Renters and landlords facing financial challenges can still get federal funding to help them. Photo: News Watch file

and churches.

The authority and its local partners also spend significant time with applicants, assigning case workers to aid each renter and conducting extensive follow-up through the application and aid allocation processes, Polak said.

"In essence, we're talking with every applicant; some of them have my direct number," she said.

Mike Walker, executive director of NeighborWorks Dakota Home Resources, said his agency participated in the first round of housing-assistance funding but declined to partner with the state in the second and third rounds. His agency, based in Deadwood, serves people western South Dakota.

Walker said the initial housing-assistance program allowed agencies to provide aid to households in both low-income and medium-income categories and to those who owned their homes. In the first round of funding, homeowners and renters who earned up to 115% of the median area income could qualify for help, whereas the second two rounds of federal funding were restricted to renters who make up to 80% of the median area income, Walker said.

"When they [the federal government] did that, that they eliminated over half their customers," Walker said. "By limiting that and giving a lot larger dollar amount, they over-allocated."

For instance, Walker said many working families in western South Dakota make enough to qualify for help at the 115% median income level, which is about \$86,700 a year for a family of four in Lawrence County. But those families, many who lost work hours and faced financial hardships during the pandemic, did not qualify for help at the 80% median income threshold, which is about \$60,300 a year in Lawrence County.

"When they put those limits on there, they eliminated some of the people who really needed the help," Walker said. "That's the main reason the money didn't go out."

The different rules came about because the first round of funding was approved by the state Legislature, and the two subsequent rounds are subject to rules set by the U.S. Treasury.

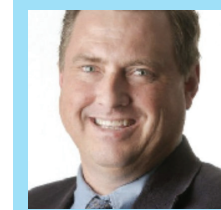
Smith said he would like to see the assistance program help more homeowners with back mortgage payments; those residents qualified only for the initial \$10 million funding effort authorized by the state Legislature in 2020.

But Smith said he sees the housing-assistance program as a great success, even if

opportunities to use funding to help even more people are not available right now.

"On the ERA program, our caseworkers are doing a bang-up job. Has it been helpful, have we seen the impact on people's lives? Yes, we have," Smith said. "Have we seen people go forward with their lives, and getting their jobs and lives going forward? Yes, we have."

Polak said the rental and utility assistance programs are ongoing, and she urged any tenants or landlords who are struggling to visit the housing authority website or their local aid agency to learn how to apply for funding. She also noted that other programs coming soon to South Dakota will be aimed at providing help to homeowners as well as renters.



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.

HOW TO APPLY FOR RENTAL ASSISTANCE

The rental assistance program is still offering help for renters and landlords who are facing financial challenges. Here are some resources to learn more about the program or apply.

Contact the South Dakota Housing Development Authority by phone at 605-773-31812 or go online to <https://www.sdhda.org> and click on SD Cares Housing Assistance.

These local agencies can also help potential applicants:

Helpline Center, Statewide – <https://www.helplinecenter.org>

Codington County Welfare, Watertown – <https://www.codington.org/welfare/>

GROW SD, Sisseton – <https://www.growsd.org>

Interlakes Community Action Program, Madison – <https://www.interlakescap.com>

Lakota Funds, Kyle – <https://lakotafunds.org>

Lutheran Social Services – <https://lsssd.org>

Mazaska Owecaso Otipi Financial, Pine Ridge – <http://mazaskacdfi.org>

NeighborWorks Dakota Home Resources, Deadwood – <https://www.neighborworksdhr.org>

Pennington County Health and Human Services, Rapid City – <https://www.pennco.org/hhs>

Rural Office of Community Services, Wagner – <https://www.rocsinc.org>

Western South Dakota Community Action, Rapid City – <https://www.wsdca.org>

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Dear EarthTalk: Is the recent lifting of quota restrictions on wolf hunting in Montana north of Yellowstone National Park a threat to the reintroduced wolf population there?

—J. W., Bend, OR

When the last gray wolf in Yellowstone National Park was gunned down in 1926, park managers and ranchers on neighboring lands alike rejoiced together that the dark predator of the range would no longer torment them. Wolves were blamed for poaching livestock as well as wreaking havoc on populations of traditional "game" animals like elk and deer. But a funny thing happened once the wolves were gone. Elk numbers started to skyrocket. In essence, without the wolf around to keep its population numbers in check, the elk were eating everything in sight, including the new young shoots of willow, aspen and other trees key to keeping Yellowstone's ecosystems in balance.

By the 1990s biologists managed to convince the federal government that these predators are essential to the health of the ecosystem, and gray wolves were famously reintroduced back into Yellowstone. The results have

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been nothing short of amazing with regard to ecosystem recovery and the return of various species of wildlife that used to be common there a century ago.

But ranchers on the periphery of the park (Wyoming, Idaho and Montana all border Yellowstone) have maintained their antipathy toward wolves given the primal canids' predilection for killing domesticated cows outside of the park for a quick and easy meal. Such situations are rare given that there is plenty of wild game for the wolves to hunt within their home base inside of Yellowstone's borders. Nevertheless, anti-environmentalists and otherwise conservative pundits have joined forces with ranchers to politicize the wolf reintroduction issue. No doubt, there is a lot of political pressure from those who make their living outside of the national park to lift all hunting restrictions on wolves that stray onto state lands.

So, it comes as no surprise that Montana would lift quotas limiting hunters and trappers to just two gray wolf kills each in regions bordering Yellowstone. A similar move in Idaho months earlier means Yellowstone's wolves are now getting it from all angles. And, indeed, with more than 15 wolf kills in the Montana borderlands alone so far this winter, it remains to be seen whether or not the easing of the state's wolf hunting restrictions is such a good idea after all. Back in 1995-1997, 42 gray wolves were relocated from Western Canada and northwestern Montana to Yellowstone; today 123 gray wolves spread themselves across nine different packs free-roaming within the national park. While the population has grown nicely and remained stable for the last decade or so, increased hunting could send these packs into dangerous territory when it comes to their ability to reproduce themselves.

Sadly, for the wolves (and for us), a false dichotomy persists that we can't have successful livestock agriculture and preserve the ecological integrity of the world's first national park at the same time. But the fact remains that we can, especially with programs to reimburse ranchers for their rarely occurring losses to wolf predation. In the meantime, the states are likely to make it easier and easier to shoot or trap wolves that unwittingly cross over into state lands, and politics will continue to be behind it all.

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Yellowstone's gray wolves, reintroduced to the region in the 1990s, are now at risk from hunting outside of park borders. Credit: Patrice Schoefolt, Pexels.com.

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A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

Imagine a condition with symptoms that present differently in each person who has it and no currently approved lab test can

definitively confirm the diagnosis. Imagine that the symptoms can flare up and then mysteriously disappear, including fatigue, low grade fevers, joint pain, and mouth sores. All these symptoms overlap with multiple other conditions further complicating a diagnosis. Imagine that the best available method for diagnosing this ailment is a manual checklist of eleven criteria and if the patient suffers from at least four, they receive a diagnosis on a scale of definite, probable, or possible.

What if I told you this condition is caused by an attack on the body by its own immune system and the main way to treat this is by suppressing the immune system we each depend upon to help protect our bodies from infection. The course of this illness can range from mild to rapidly progressing to organ failure and death. This condition is real and has a most appropriate name which means "the wolf" in Latin. The condition is systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), a condition which evades diagnosis and is difficult to treat.

Lupus mainly affects women between the ages of 15 and 40, particularly women of color. For many busy young women with lupus, symptoms are often brushed off by family, friends, and unfortunately sometimes by health care providers who may view the patient as being "tired" or "over worked." Routine wellness lab tests, which serve as an alert system for other illnesses, provide no indication of lupus. Patients who persist and find someone to further investigate their symptoms may be misdiagnosed with a myriad of other conditions sometimes resulting in unnecessary medications, treatments, and further suffering.

Work is underway to better understand lupus. The trigger that causes the immune system to start attacking itself is not known, but scientists suspect it involves a combination of genetic and environmental factors.

Research and awareness are making a difference. In the 1950s, the 5-year and 10-year survival of SLE patients was less than 50 percent. Since then, that number has improved to over 90 percent. This increase in survival rate stems from improvements in our ability to diagnosis lupus earlier and to provide better treatments once diagnosed. But we must do better. Early diagnosis of lupus requires patients and health care providers working together to persist in finding this "wolf in sheep's clothing."

If you or a loved one has a concern about lupus or other autoimmune conditions, talk with your doctor and see if a consultation with a rheumatologist would be beneficial.

Jill Kruse, D.O. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices family medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc®, a medical Q&A show celebrating its twentieth season of truthful, tested, and timely medical information, broadcast on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



By Jill Kruse, D.O.