



GRASS ROOTS REPORT

WINTER 2025

2025 Legislative Session In Progress

BY LARRY SYVERSON, NDTOA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As this is being written, we are entering the 4th week of the 69th session of the ND Legislative Assembly. This session runs the gamut of possibilities. There is the possibility of significantly increased funding for townships. Contrasting that is the possibility of levy caps that will restrict the township’s ability to control its own budget and levy. Some measures will improve the township’s ability to deal with certain situations, and others aim to strike at township local control. For more information about those bills, see the articles in this issue about NDTOA Priorities and Defense.

The most up-to-date information on legislation that affects townships can be found on NDTOA.COM. Click “2025 Legislative Assembly”. A Legiscan report which is updated each Monday morning, is available at <https://legiscan.com/reports/hamnt69z> . We will be sending out weekly legislative updates to all the email addresses on file. If you wish to receive the updates

please email larry.ndtoa@gmail.com to get put on the list. Please check your spam folder if you are on the list and still don’t get the updates. If you find our emails in your spam folder, please click “Not Spam” to tell the system the emails are valid and not spam.

Your association is putting a lot of effort into getting the best results we can from this session. You can be a part of the effort. There is still time to register for the Local Government Capitol Connection, which will be held on February 18th and 19th (see the poster in this issue). Local government leaders will fill the capitol and interact with legislators and other government officials. If you would rather not go for that two-day program, there is the one-day, no-charge option for Township Officers at the Capitol for February 19th. One way or the other, it is all about proving to the state leaders that local governments (especially Townships) matter.

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NDTOA DEFENSIVE STAND

A number of bills have been introduced that target township local control. Legislators introduced these bills for various reasons, mostly frustration with local resistance to certain developments. NDTOA fully supports local control.

- HB1239** Restricts Cities, Counties, and Townships’ ability to regulate data processing centers.
- HB1258** PSC may supersede local regulations for powerline construction
- HB1444** The county can take a road from a township by a vote of the commission.
- SB2208** Strips a county or township of their County and Township Infrastructure Fund (Prairie Dog payments) if their zoning “interferes” with an energy project.

You can check out these and other bills that chip away at township local control on NDTOA.COM. Click “2025 Legislative Assembly”

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

BY LEE BRANDVOLD

Hello Township Officers,

Another year has flown by. When I graduated from North Shore High School in 1982, I remember an older gentleman walking down the reception line, congratulating the seniors. As he reached me, he paused and asked if I ever thought my 12-year school journey would end. I had to stop and think for a moment before replying. I told him there were definitely moments when it felt like time stood still—especially during that hour-long history class after lunch, where I struggled to stay awake and absorb the lecture at the same time. Back then, I was convinced that hour would never end! He chuckled and said, “Hang on to your hat because time is going to fly by now. “He was absolutely right!” As I get older, I realize we need to slow down and enjoy what life has given us.

It has already been over a month since the NDTOA Annual Convention was held in Bismarck. I would like to again thank Dakota Community Bank and Livestock Alliance for help sponsoring the convention. The speakers that were selected for the convention were again top notch. They all shared valuable information with the township officers in attendance.

Speaking of attendance, it would be great to see more township officers attend the annual convention. It's unclear why we are unable to engage more township officers in this important event. In North Dakota we have over 6000 township officers, yet fewer than 100 attended the 2024 NDTOA Annual Convention. For NDTOA to remain a strong and effective association, increased involvement from our township officers is essential.

In 2025, elections will be held during the annual convention to fill the positions of President, Vice President and three directors. According to NDTOA Constitution, the President and Vice-President are limited to two-year terms, with a maximum of three consecutive terms. Both the President and Vice-President will term out in December 2025.

The districts that directors will be up for election are Districts 1, 3, and 5. (Please reference the map in your township officers handbook if you are questioning which district you are in). With less than a year to identify candidates, it's crucial that we find well-qualified individuals to step into these roles. Their leadership and involvement are essential to maintaining the strength and effectiveness of our association.

If you have new ideas to help boost attendance at the annual meeting, or if you are interested in running for a NDTOA board position, please email me at ljb.ranch4@gmail.com or call me at 701-720-5457. Let's keep NDTOA strong and working for North Dakota's Township Officers.

Respectfully,

President Lee Brandvold

2025 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING FOR TOWNSHIP ROADS AND BRIDGES

- Dedicate the remainder of the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax to Transportation
 - SB2142
 - 25% of the remainder to the Township Road and Bridge Sustainability Fund
 - 75% of the remainder to the NDDOT Flexible Transportation Fund
- Dedicate a part of the Legacy Earnings Fund for County and Township Bridges
 - SB2151
 - \$100 million to the County and Township Bridge Fund
 - Also provides funds to the Legacy Earnings Tax Relief Fund
- Support a 3 Cent gas tax increase dedicated to local governments
 - HB1382
 - One Cent to Counties
 - One Cent to Cities
 - One Cent to Townships – Based on the Maintained Miles
- Support the Agriculture Facility Infrastructure Fund
 - SB2177
 - Not a new tax!
 - It transfers the sales and use taxes collected from animal ag developments to this fund.
 - Fund to be used by the county for infrastructure related to the development
 - An amendment is pending to include townships in the fund.

OTHER TOWNSHIP PRIORITIES

- HB1374 Open meetings exemption for township officers conducting on-site inspections
- SB2069 Website posting option for newspaper notice requirements
- SB2317 Township recovering zoning authority from the county
- SB2329 Townships and Counties may vacate streets and alleys of dissolved cities.
- HB1026 Allows for adequate bonding ability – State Bonding Fund
- SB2020 Budget, which includes the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute
- **Defend Local Control!** A number of bills have been introduced that would severely limit or nullify local control.

Keep in tune with legislative developments on NDTOA.COM and watch for Legislative Updates coming in your email.

What is the North Dakota State Bonding Fund?

The North Dakota State Bonding Fund, administered by the North Dakota Insurance Department since July 2019, provides fidelity bond coverage to state agencies and political subdivisions. Fidelity bonds cover losses due to employee embezzlement, larceny, or gross negligence. Agencies and subdivisions must apply for bonding biennially or when coverage changes.

Currently, entities don't pay premiums for coverage, as reserves exceed \$2 million. However, if reserves drop below this threshold, a \$2.50 per-employee premium may be assessed. Claims must be reported within 60 days of discovering a wrongful act, or they are waived. Claims require a verified abstract of facts.

For claims, entities should contact the NDIRF Underwriting Department at (701) 224-1988 or BondingFund@ndirf.com. The Underwriting Team will notify the State Auditor's Office, responsible for investigating and reporting findings to the Insurance Department.

If your entity has further questions about the Bonding Fund, including renewals and filing a claim, contact the NDIRF Underwriting Department at (701) 224-1988 or BondingFund@ndirf.com.

**The original text for this article was written by NDIRF Marketing and Communications Manager Joanna Drennen. Drennen used ChatGPT to shorten the article's original text for its publication in this email.*

Elections held for NDTOA Board positions – Dale Schmitz Elected to District 2



Dale Schmitz

On December 2, 2024, during the 2024 NDTOA 68th Annual meeting, elections for even-numbered board positions were held. Leon Monke of Regent was re-elected for District 4, and Tim Geinert of Nortonville was re-elected for District 6. For District 2, Dale Schmitz of Harvey, who serves in Manfred Township of Wells County, was elected, replacing Richard Lynne of Maddock, who chose not to run for re-election. Dale has been instrumental in setting up the Fessenden workshops for several sessions.

Local Government Capitol Connection AGENDA

All events held at the Bismarck Event Center unless otherwise noted.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 18

- 3:00 p.m. Welcome
- 3:10 p.m. Governor's Address
- 3:40 p.m. "HOW TO" OF LEGISLATIVE ENGAGEMENT
Learn effective strategies for engaging with legislators and advocating for your community's needs. This session will provide practical tips and best practices for building relationships with legislators and growing your confidence in the legislative process.
- 4:25 p.m. PROPERTY TAX PANEL
Property tax is a hot topic this legislative session. Hear from a panel of experts about property tax legislation that has been proposed and how it may impact political subdivisions.
- 5:30-7:30 p.m. LEGISLATIVE SOCIAL
Network with fellow local government officials and professionals, along with legislators and key stakeholders in a relaxed setting. This social event is an excellent opportunity to build relationships and discuss the day's insights in an informal atmosphere.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 19

- 8:30 a.m. Welcome and Announcements
- 8:40 a.m. Minority Leaders Address
- 9:10 a.m. LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES PANEL
Join a panel of representatives from the political subdivision state associations as they discuss pressing legislative topics affecting local government.
- 10:10 a.m. Break
- 10:30 a.m. BE A PART!
Established in 1986, the ND Insurance Reserve Fund (NDRIF) was created to provide insurance coverage for political subdivisions, enabling them to deliver essential and valuable government services. Dedicated exclusively to serving North Dakota's political subdivisions, all at a stable cost. Join NDRIF's Chief Executive Officer, Keith Pic, to learn more about what the NDRIF does and how you can be a part of its success.
- 11:00 a.m. Majority Leaders Address
- 11:30 a.m. LUNCH - Capitol
Grab a boxed lunch at the Event Center before attending floor sessions or legislative hearings, or attend the Public Safety Lunch at the Capitol – Indicate your choice on your registration.

Attendees are encouraged to attend floor sessions and legislative hearings each day to deepen their understanding of ongoing legislative activities.

REGISTRATION

The cost to attend is \$60 per person. Registration will open Dec. 2, 2024, on the ND School Board Association website at ndsba.org/capitol-connection.
No cancellations after noon on February 10, 2025.



TREASURER'S REPORT

BY BARB KNUTSON

Happy New Year to all! Very busy time of year with legislature in session and end of year bookwork. Just a few reminders. Totally an echo chamber! Please make sure you have given your county information on all board members with mailing addresses not necessarily physical address. Along with that it is very helpful to have email addresses and cell phone numbers for those that want to share. The mailing of newsletters is getting more complex all the time, what with the new and improved address checking. If you or your board members are not getting the emails

and newsletters, please contact me and let me know. I will do my best to rectify!

Next month, the 2025 dues invoices will be in the mail for those townships that the state directly invoices. If you have a new treasurer in your township or if you do not get an invoice and you feel you should have, contact me please. They have gotten lost in the mail in the past.

Thank you to those that have paid dues and included lists of the townships that paid dues. Importance is because if we have no record of them having paid, they will not

be eligible to vote at the Annual Convention in December. Also appreciate very much those auditors that share their address lists with us.

One last item. The bonding that is handled by North Dakota Insurance Reserve Fund is of importance to all townships. Because I have been getting several calls on this subject, I contacted NDIRE. Luckily, they had an article ready to go. Please make sure you familiarize yourself with this information! Any questions, reach out! They are very willing to help!

Hope all is well with you all!

Local Government Capitol Connection (continued)

ACCOMMODATIONS

Room blocks have been reserved at the Bismarck hotels listed below. Please contact the hotel of your choice directly to reserve your room.

Hotel	Rates	Block Deadline	Booking Link	Phone
Bismarck Hotel & Conference Center 800 S 3rd Street	\$110/single \$110/double	Feb. 3, 2025	Bismarck Hotel & Conference Center BOOKING LINK	701-660-8063
Candlewood Suites 4400 Skyline Crossing	\$99 flat rate	Jan. 27, 2025	Reference Room Block "Capitol Connection"	701-751-8900
EverSpring Inn 200 Bismarck Expressway	\$99 flat rate	Feb. 3, 2025	Reference Room Block "Capitol Connection"	701-222-2900
EverSpring Suites 180 E Bismarck Expressway	\$99 flat rate	Feb. 10, 2025	Reference Room Block "Capitol Connection"	701-222-3311
Holiday Inn of Bismarck 3903 State Street	\$99 flat rate	Jan. 27, 2025	Reference Room Block "Capitol Connection"	701-751-8240
Radisson Hotel Bismarck 605 E Broadway Ave.	\$99 flat rate	Jan. 18, 2025	Radisson Hotel Bismarck BOOKING LINK	701-712-6475
Ramada Bismarck Hotel 1400 E Interchange Ave.	\$99/single \$110/double	Feb. 3, 2025	Reference Room Block "Capitol Connection"	701-258-7000
Wingate by Wyndham Bismarck 1421 Skyline Blvd.	\$99 flat rate	Jan. 29, 2025	Wingate by Wyndham Bismarck BOOKING LINK	701-751-2373

Hosted by NDACo, NDLC, NDRPA, NDSBA, & NDTOA

Township Officers at the Capitol

If you don't wish to participate with the full two-day Local Government Capitol Connection event you can still be part of the effort.

Please see page 6 for details.

Township Officers at the Capitol 2025

Wednesday, February 19th, 2025

Township officers are invited to the North Dakota State Capitol to sit through hearings, meet with legislators and officials and participate in the legislative process!

TENTATIVE AGENDA

8:30 am – Committee Hearings

11:30 am – Dutch Lunch (side room of Cafeteria)

1:00 pm – House and Senate Floor Sessions

2:30 pm – Recap meeting (Cafeteria)

3:00 pm – Free Time (Capitol Tour, Heritage Center visit,
Meet with your Legislators, etc)

4:30 pm – Social reception (TBD)

**To RSVP or for more information: larry.ndtoa@gmail.com
or call (701)430-1735 (if no answer please leave a message)**

The goal of this event is not to detract from the Local Government Capitol Connection but rather to add to it.

To give those who don't have the time for a two-day event a chance to participate.

There is no registration cost for this option.

This option does not include the activities that will be downtown at the Bismarck Event Center.

Participants will join a crowd of local government leaders in the Capitol building to inform lawmakers that local government matters.

While we are there, let them know that WE STAND FOR LOCAL CONTROL!

To REGISTER, or for MORE INFORMATION, check out NDTOA.COM/EVENTS

NDTOA AWARDS



2024 NDTOA President's Award - Dana Larsen

The NDTOA President's Award is an award given to someone who is not a township officer in recognition of outstanding service to townships. This year's award went to Ward County Engineer Dana Larsen.

Dana grew up on a farm and ranch south of Grenora, North Dakota. He started work with the Ward County Highway Department as an assistant county engineer in 1999. In 2008, Dana was promoted to the head county engineer position, which he still holds today.

Through the years, Dana has always been willing to work with and advise township officers who require help building or maintaining roads. Even though Dana has a full schedule of County work this year, he still found time to submit the grant applications to NDDOT for the Ward County townships that needed road repair and culverts. Of the three Ward County township applications that Dana helped submit, all three projects were funded by the grants they applied for. The total of the township grant projects was over \$370,000.00.

Dana is an individual who goes above and beyond to help people, and he always appears to enjoy his job. The award was presented to Ward County Engineer Dana Larsen by NDTOA President Lee Brandvold during the convention banquet on December 2nd.



2024 NDTOA Legislator of the Year – Senator Larry Luick

Senator Larry Luick was chosen as the Legislator of the year 2024 because of his constant support of townships and concern for rural issues.

He is from Fairmount, ND, and has served District 25 as its senator since 2011. He is currently the Chairman of the Senate Agriculture and Veterans Affairs Committee and also serves on the Senate Judiciary Committee.

He is a farmer and owns a construction company. He has served his community on several boards and positions: Red River Human Services; NCSL Vice Chairman, Ag Task Force; Chairman, NCSL Natural Resources Committee; NCSL Energy and Environment Committee; Past President (8 Years), Fairmount Public School Board (9 years); Knights of Columbus; Sons of Legion Member.

He is married, he and his wife, Yolanda, have five children.



2024 NDTOA Grassroots Leadership Award – Thomas Volochenko

Born in 1955, Tom Volochenko has been a lifelong resident of the Butte rural community. He graduated from Butte High School and has always endeavored to be the best farmer and neighbor possible. He has spent decades of active service on various boards in the Butte area to help his community.

Tom has served as a township officer of Byersville Township in McLean County for many years, working to ensure the roads are properly improved and maintained to handle heavy loads safely. He patrols the roads of his township to ensure the gravel, blading, and signs are done right. He has always been the one to provide help for neighbors who needed the snow cleared from their drives or travelers stranded by winter's worst.

To read more about Tom's service, check out the awards tab on NDTOA.COM



Grass Roots Report

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Check Out The New NDTOA.COM Website!

New look! The site is also mobile friendly so check it out on your phone. Resources, important township information is added frequently – check back often.

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For North Dakota. For Local Government. For You.

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