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## 'Powerful storm' predicted for region

Rain expected to gradually turn to heavy snow, strong winds

> By C.S. Hagen The Forum

FARGO — A "surprising return to winter" is forecast in North Dakota and northern Minnesota this week, bringing heavy snow and a potential blizzard to the region.

Rain Tuesday will

snow and strong winds, most likely lasting into Thursday, said WDAY Chief Meteorologist John Wheeler.

within the areas that get Wheeler said. mostly snow," Wheeler The early sp said Sunday.

to get a foot of snow, It comes from east of Wheeler said. Some areas the Rockies and moves

gradually turn to heavy may be hit with more northeast, bringing with rain, while other areas may get the heavier snowfall. It's early in the prediction process for specific details.

"It's going to be a "I don't want to paint powerful storm. It's the picture that every-"I don't want to paint pretty likely this will be one will get buried with a major disrupter if not a foot of snow. That's a complete shutdown not how it will work,"

The early spring storm aid Sunday. is known as a "Colora-Not everyone is likely do low," Wheeler said.

it humidity and snow.

With at least two days to go until the storm hits, Wheeler said meteorologists will know more Tuesday, when they can more precisely predict which areas will get hit the hardest.

"A foot of snow is likely for more than half and possibly most of our area along with wind. Strong wind is likely and a blizzard is possible," Wheel-

The National Weather Service also report- could see up to three feet ed that Fargo and Grand Forks could see "crip-pling winter impacts" with a potential for at least 12 inches of snow. West of Fargo has a high chance of major snow, the National Weather Service reported.

Travel will be extremely difficult or impossible across all of North Dakota into northwestern Minnesota late Tuesday into Thursday.

Some affected areas of snow, the National Weather Service reported.

With more snow on the way, a second spring crest of the Red River in Fargo could be seen Friday just under 25 feet, which is the height of moderate flood stage, according to a hydrograph from the National Weather Service.

Readers can reach Forum reporter C.S. Hagen at 701-241-5535 or cshagen@forumcomm.com.

## NDSU prof logs 51 years in classroom and counting

**Architecture** professor known for stories, knowledge joins club of three

By Barry Amundson The Forum

FARGO — A member of the elite club of the longest-serving professors at North Dakota State University said most of his friends are former students.

Ron Ramsay, who said he basically had to be pushed through the door in his first architectural department class in August of 1971 at the young age of 26, can probably credit that to the more in-depth connections he made with his students that he continues to forge as he finishes up his 51 years of teaching.

Matt Peikert, a current student from Osakis, Minnesota, said beside Ramsay's "wide array of knowledge on not only architectural history but everything," he has learned much more from the 77-year-old.

"He told all of us that he wanted to know who we were, our passions and hobbies," Peikert said. As the conversations continued, the student said he also "learned a lot about life's lessons" from the Chicago native.

Moreover, Ramsay's approach to teaching architectural history is noteworthy, according to his students and colleagues.

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Eric Hylden / Grand Forks Herald

A farmer plants wheat in the northeastern North Dakota town of Nekoma, home to a Cold War-era, pyramid-shaped missile silo complex. State commerce department officials want to see the decommissioned site retrofitted into a large-scale data center, possibly one that mines cryptocurrency.

# Courting crypto

ND aims to draw Bitcoin miners with promise of world's 'cleanest crypto'

**By Adam Willis** The Forum

**Bismarck** orth Dakota has a new sales pitch for out-of-state investors: a home for the "cleanest crypto on the planet.'

That was the mantra at the Bitcoin 2022 conference in Miami, where two state Department

of Commerce representatives traveled last week to talk with prospective investors in the world of digital currencies. A \$35,000 trip, the commerce department said it intended to yield a return of 20,000% or more from the Miami conference.

A combination of cold, dry weather

and cheap electricity costs are attracting a growing number of data center operators to North Dakota. At the same time, government leaders have touted the state as an emerging hub for these energyintensive server farms, some of which mine cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin, Etherium and others.

Commerce **Commissioner James** Leiman said the state's cryptocurrency pitch is part of a broader effort to diversify an economy largely dependent on commodity markets like oil and agriculture. While the state has so far announced around \$3 billion of crypto investment, Leiman said his department

is close to sealing investments from another \$3 billion worth of projects, including several investors that state officials planned to meet with in Miami.

Data center projects have not received any state funding in North Dakota to this point,

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#### Today's weather



**Scattered showers** Details, B8

## **Fourth Cass County** human services leader retires amid bullying, favoritism claims

By April Baumgarten The Forum

FARGO — A fourth Cass County Human Services leader has quit after an internal investigation found he harassed, intimidated and bullied staff all claims that he denied.

Economic Assistance Manager Sidney Schock retired April 1, according to documents obtained by The Forum through an open records request. He announced his resignation in a six-page email **CASS**: Page A8

sent March 25 that denied claims of wrongdoing laid out in an investigative

Schock had been on administrative leave since Jan. 11 after a complaint was filed against him on

An investigative report dated March 18 detailed those complaints, which surfaced Dec. 22. The formal complaint noted concerns of favoritism,

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#### **CASS**

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targeting, bullying, intimidation, discrimination and a hostile work environment.

More than 50 people, including Schock and 42 current economic assistance employees under authority, were interviewed during the investigation. Employees were satisfied with their duties, but Schock was found to be at the center of most of the concerns, the report said.

"The heart of the issue is Sidney's management and loss of confidence in work unit management," one staff member said. "A shift happened when Sidney became a division manager. It became a good ol' boys club."

Schock joined Cass County Social Services in 1981 as an eligibility worker. He determined what benefits a resident who sought help from the economic assistance division received. He was promoted to supervisor in 1996 then to division manager in 2015.

Internal investigators found Schock had a negative impact on the work environment. It alleged he asked an employee on Dec. 20 to submit a resignation letter despite that person not making plans to resign.

The employee reported that Schock retaliated against them by giving that person a poor performance evaluation without explanation and denying annual leave. When the employee subsequently announced their resignation, the person's keys and security badge were prematurely taken, the report

Other employees reported Schock targeted them after they brought forward concerns about the workplace. Their personal belongings were boxed up or discarded at Schock's instruction, the report said.

"There were repeated

reports of team members seeking outside employment due to Mr. Schock's intimidating and bullying behaviors and overall poor working environment," the report alleged. "When team members submitted resignation notices, they were treated poorly and inconsistently when compared with their peers."

In May, former Human Services Director Pearl Mell caught Schock trving to access locked personnel files in the administrative staff manager's office without permission, the report alleged.

Not all employees said negative things about Schock. One said he was 'calm, cool and collected," and another said the work environment was "wonderful" and had a "supportive and family feeling," the report said.

The report determined Schock micromanaged, demeaned and acted unprofessionally to his team. He mismanaged the division and was likely the root cause of turnover, the report said.

"Overall feelings expressed from (Cass County Human Services Zone) Economic Assistance team members during this investigation included frustration, fear of change, stress, distrust, feeling overwhelmed and embarrassment," report said, adding one employee commented, "It doesn't feel good to really suck, but we do."

The report recommended a number of changes for the economic assistance division, including developing methods to gather employee feedback, the hiring revising process, reviewing the organizational structure and updating training practices.

For Schock, the report suggested management training and reflective supervision coaching.

"Careful consideration should be given as to whether Mr. Schock should return to (the) economic assistance division," the report said.
Schock declined to

comment for this story, but he said in his email he had no wish to return to the economic assistance division. Some of the claims came as a surprise to him, and some were "patently false" and unfounded,

his email said.

"I try hard to treat each staff member with respect and respond to each in like terms,' Schock wrote.

Three other human services leaders retired this year, all from the child protection unit. Family Services Division Manager Linda Dorff and social worker supervisors Rick VanCamp and Tamara Anderson left their posts Jan. 31 after another internal investigation found evidence of them contributing to a hostile

work environment. Dorff, VanCamp and Anderson denied wrongdoing and called the investigation biased.

Schock's case appeared to be unrelated to the claims made against the child protection leaders.

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#### **CRYPTO**

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Leiman said, though Tax Commissioner Brian Kroshus said tax exemptions are available in some cases for technological equipment like servers, routing systems and computer software.

"These engagements, this branding and this awareness is paying off in dividends," said Leiman, who added that North Dakota has the right resources, infrastructure and tax structure to "plant the flag" as producer of "the cleanest barrel of oil" and the world's "cleanest crypto."

But as North Dakota leaders put in a push to lure more cryptocurrency investment, one state energy official said he is wary of the trade-offs that more data centers could require, while some experts on digital currencies questioned the state's ability to marry its climate goals with crypto mining.

In January, Gov. Doug Burgum and two Montana companies unveiled a massive, \$1.9 billion data center near Williston that developers billed as the largest of its kind in the world. Crypto companies are building data centers near Jamestown and Grand Forks. And Bismarck-based Rainbow Energy, which is in the process of buying North Dakota's largest coal-fired power plant, has said it intends to deploy a data center as part of the purchase, though the company has not provided specifics on that plan.

The state's data center sector could also be expanding soon. The developer of the 700 megawatt data center near Williston, **FX Solutions President** Richard Tabish, said that project is one part of a mammoth 1.6 gigawatts of data centers that his company is pursuing in

other parts of the state. Leiman said his department is looking to double or triple the \$3 billion of crypto mining investment in North Dakota. Among the assets pitched by state officials at the Miami Bitcoin conference, Leiman said, was the Cold Warera, pyramid-shaped missile silo complex in the northeastern North Dakota town of Nekoma. Commerce department officials want to see the decommissioned site retrofitted into a largescale data center.

#### **Energy suck**

Mining crypto a process in which specialized computers solve increasingly challenging



Provided photo Josh Teigen, director of economic development and finance for the North Dakota Department of Commerce, and Shayden Akason, the department's head of investment and innovation, at the Bitcoin 2022 conference in Miami in April.

mathematical puzzles to unlock currency requires vast amounts of energy. Once it reaches full-tilt, the Williston facility, operated by Atlas Power, is expected to draw significantly more energy than any city in North Dakota. According to the analytic to do those if we're website Digiconomist a single Bitcoin transaction requires 2,112 kilowatt hours of electricity, equivalent to the 72 days of power consumption in an average U.S. household.

Due in part to these high-powered operations, North Dakota Transmission Authority Director John Weeda said he has "mixed emotions" about the expanding data center sector in North

Dakota. Calls about crypto projects have dropped off as the volatile Bitcoin markets have fallen in recent months, Weeda said. He added that North Dakota has a limited supply of around-the-clock electricity generation, and data centers will be competing for energy with industrial projects that could provide more jobs and direct benefits to established industries. A slate of projects that have

applied for or received state funding through a recently established energy fund are among the state's high priority developments with large energy demands of their own, Weeda said.

"I would hate to see us not be able overcommitted to something we're less sure about," he said.

Dale Haugen, general manager at Mountrail-Williams Electric Cooperative, which will be supplying power to the Williston data center, said he's not concerned about limited electric generation in his area. North Dakota exports more electricity than it uses, he noted, and there should be ample room on the grid for both data centers and other energyintensive projects. Mountrail-William Electric recruited the 700 megawatt data center to Williston, and they are courting three more data center projects to the area,

Haugen said. Still, Tabish, developer of the Atlas Power data center, said he believes his company has already "tied up the lion's share" of electric generation in several regions of North Dakota

with its 1.6 gigawatts in data center projects.

And while Tabish stressed that FX Solutions relies on high-caliber equipment and plans to remain in North Dakota for the long term, he also warned of the "hitand-run" strategies of some crypto miners. It's not uncommon for crypto mining "energy hunters" to swoop in to tap a cheap energy supply, before abandoning an area when the finances don't pan out, Tabish said.

#### 'Cleanest crypto on the planet'?

Because of the vast amounts of energy required to create digital currencies, crypto mining has drawn criticism from environmentalists who see the process as feeding fossil fuel generation and unnecessarily driving planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions.

Some companies have looked for more environmentally sustainable ways to mine cryptocurrencies and have touted climate friendly goals. At the announcement of the Williston data center in January, Atlas Power President **Kevin Washington** said his company aims to become "the largest cryptocurrency company in the world with a carbon neutral

footprint." North Dakota offers several advantages to companies looking to sustainably mine digital currencies, Leiman said. Data centers can locate near power plants in North Dakota, allowing for more efficient transmission of electricity, and some smaller crypto mining operations in the Bakken oil fields are running off excess natural gas that otherwise would have been burned directly into the atmosphere.

Ongoing efforts to capture the greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel-powered sources in North Dakota are also key to the state's pathway to clean crypto mining, Leiman said. Those carbon

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capture ambitions are central to Burgum's target of achieving statewide carbon neutrality by 2030.

But carbon carbon capture technology has so far been sparsely used globally, and it remains untested at the scale needed to put a dent into North Dakota's emissions. Some experts on the energy consumption of cryptocurrencies said they are doubtful that North Dakota will be able to scale up crypto currency mining without increasing its output of planet-warming emissions.

Joshua Rhodes, a research associate at the University of Texas' Webber Energy Group, said local tax revenues and a limited number of technical jobs are among the economic benefits that data centers can bring to an area. The higher demands on the power grid may also require utility companies to build new power generation facilities, spurring additional jobs and economic growth, he

Still, Rhodes, who has consulted for a Bitcoin company looking for cleaner ways to mine crypto, said powering data centers without increasing emissions requires a number of specific steps. Unless a data center is contracting for 100% renewable power, it will no doubt drive higher

emissions, he said. Haugen said Basin

Electric would be serving the Atlas Power data center with a mix of generation types, which could vary between wind, coal and natural gas depending on the day.

Jonathan Koomey, formerly a researcher at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory who has spent several decades studying the electricity use of information technology, said that, if a data center is taking its power straight off the grid, without contracting for clean power or building out its own renewable generation, it's likely to drive higher emissions.

Koomey also warned against opaque actors in the crypto world who are liable to pick up and leave an area once conditions no longer fit their needs. Though data centers can provide some jobs and knock-on economic boosts, Koomey said the risks of volatile crypto markets and miners' large energy demands can come back to bite a community.

"Just because they have a big money flow and some private benefits that get people to support the project, doesn't mean that the project has benefits for all of North Dakota," he

Readers can reach Forum reporter Adam Willis, a Report for America corps member, at awillis@forumcomm.com.

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