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# The Forum

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SATURDAY, APRIL 16, 2022

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## ND lawmaker exchanged 72 texts with child porn suspect

By April Baumgarten  
The Forum



Morgan-Derosier

GRAND FORKS — North Dakota's longest-serving state senator exchanged 72 text messages with an inmate suspected of child porn and sex abuse crimes, jail records show.

A phone number used by Sen. Ray Holmberg, a powerful Grand Forks Republican, was among

those 34-year-old Nicholas James Morgan-Derosier texted in flurries of communication on Aug. 23 and 24 when Morgan-Derosier was incarcerated last year at the Grand Forks County Jail.

a text messaging service in jail, which is what Morgan-Derosier did, a jail official confirmed.

Reached by phone, Holmberg said his text messages with Morgan-Derosier were related to "a variety of things," including patio work Morgan-Derosier did for him.

Inmates can pay money to use **TEXTS:** Page A10



Forum News Service file photo

Sen. Ray Holmberg, R-Grand Forks, addresses members of the North Dakota House and Senate appropriations committees on Jan. 7, 2019.



Bruce Crummy / The Forum

A boater moves along Wall Street on April 15, 1997, in Oakport Township during the height of the 1997 flood.

## WAKE-UP CALL

25 years later, lessons from 1997 flood protect F-M area

By Patrick Springer  
The Forum

Fargo Morrie Lanning won't forget staring at water erupting like a geyser from a manhole cover in south Moorhead when floodwater infiltrated the storm sewer system.

That frightening spectacle, which came in the middle of the night, happened during the 1997 Red River flood, which crested 25 years ago on April 18 at 39.72 feet, then a record.

"It was really kind of scary to see geysers coming out of the street," said Lanning, Moorhead's mayor at the time. "It was incredible to see that water. I'm sure it shot up 20 feet in the air."



Dave Wallis / The Forum

Looking southeast, not even a road is visible as water surrounds houses in the Timberline neighborhood in southwest Fargo in 1997.

One of the most sobering moments for Bruce Furness, who was Fargo mayor, was when engineers decided it was necessary to build a contingency levee in far south Fargo — enraging homeowners to the south, who would be

unprotected. "Some of the people were really upset," Furness said, recalling that police accompanied city officials at a meeting where emotions surged. "It was kind of tough. A lot of things couldn't be

handled." Fortunately, the neighborhoods and all but a few flood-prone areas near the river were spared, unlike Grand Forks and East Grand Forks, both devastated by extensive flooding.

The 1997 flood was full of unpleasant surprises — and valuable lessons that helped fight an even worse flood to follow, the record 2009 flood, which crested more than a foot higher at 40.84 feet.

The 1997 flood, which came early in the wet weather pattern that would produce many more floods, delivered a wake-up call that jolted officials to become better prepared.

**FLOOD:** Page A8

## Fargo legislative candidates set for June primary

By Jeremy Turley  
The Forum

BISMARCK — The names of 36 Fargo area legislative candidates are locked in ahead of the June 14 primary election, but Cass County voters won't have any hard decisions in the intra-party races.

Normally, only about half of the seats in the North Dakota Legislature are on the ballot each election cycle, but due to the decennial redistricting process, 98 of the 141 seats are up for grabs this year, including 24 in Cass County.

Although Republicans hold a supermajority in both the state House of Representatives and Senate, the Fargo area serves as one of the few battlegrounds where Democrats have proven competitive.

A total of 19 Republicans and 17 Democrats are running for the Legislature in the Fargo area, but the distribution of candidates in each race means all of them will advance to the November general election as their respective parties' nominees unless they withdraw. Ten of the candidates are currently unopposed and won't face competition in November unless independent candidates emerge after the primary.

The new District 10, which lies west of Interstate 29, will be contested between the two parties come November. Former Republican Sen. Curtis Olafson faces Democrat Ryan

Braunberger in the Senate race. Three candidates, Republican Steve Swiontek and Democrats Hamida Dakane and Damian Ridl, will be vying for two House seats.

In District 11, most of which lies just north of Interstate 94, Democratic incumbent Sen. Tim Mathern is running unopposed. In the House race, incumbent Democratic Rep. Gretchen Dobervich and newcomer Liz Conmy face Republican newcomers Carter Eisinger and Brad Leaser. Incumbent Democratic Rep. Ron Guggisberg opted not to run for reelection.

In West Fargo's District 13, Republican incumbent Sen. Judy Lee is running unopposed for the upper chamber. GOP

**PRIMARY:** Page A6

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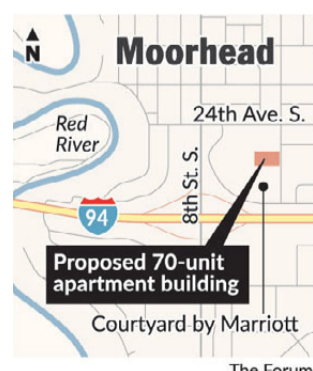
### Neighbors oppose 70-unit apartment building project

Moorhead City Council OKs conditional-use authorization

By Barry Amundson  
The Forum

MOORHEAD — Sandy Asleson and a few of her neighbors have been gathering signatures against a planned 70-unit apartment building in their neighborhood in south Moorhead.

She said that at almost every door they knocked on was someone willing to sign the petition.



The Forum

The apartment building would be built at 2501 11th St. S. between the Courtyard by Marriott hotel and the Riverpointe Senior Campus.

**PROJECT:** Page A6

## FARMLAND FOR SALE

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**SPORTS:** Kindred's Paul Olson commits to Bison two weeks after first varsity meet.



# NEW CASA

Casa Delicia food truck opens downtown restaurant, BUSINESS

# The Forum

OF FARGO - MOORHEAD

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TUESDAY, APRIL 26, 2022

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## Holmberg to resign

### Move comes after Forum investigation of texts with child porn suspect

By Jeremy Turley  
The Forum

BISMARCK — North Dakota Sen. Ray Holmberg announced Monday, April 25, that he will resign from the state Legislature following a Forum report that he exchanged text messages with a man accused of child pornography crimes.

“Recent news stories have become a distraction for the important work of the legislative assembly during its interim meetings,” Holmberg said in a news release. “I want to do what I can, within my power, to lessen such distractions. Consequently, in respect for the institution and its other 140 members, I shall resign my Senate seat effective June 1, 2022.”

Holmberg said the June 1 date will give GOP leaders in his district time to appoint his replacement. None of Holmberg’s interim committees are scheduled to meet before the resignation date.

Holmberg did not respond to a request for comment Monday, and his Fargo-based attorney, Mark Friese, said he didn’t have anything to add to his client’s statement.

The Grand Forks Republican senator, who was first elected in 1976, announced in March he would not seek another term this year, citing health issues including weakened cognitive abilities. The retirement announcement prompted an outpouring of praise for Holmberg from the state’s top officials.

An investigation published by The Forum on April 15 revealed that Holmberg exchanged 72 text messages in August with Nicholas James Morgan-Derosier, a Grand Forks County Jail inmate suspected of child porn and sex abuse crimes.

Holmberg, North Dakota’s longest-serving state senator, told The Forum he sent text messages to Morgan-Derosier about “a variety of things,” including patio work Morgan-Derosier did for him. Holmberg said he didn’t know Morgan-Derosier was in jail during their virtual conversation.

Five months prior to the text exchanges, The Grand Forks Herald wrote a story about 10 child porn charges filed against Morgan-Derosier in Grand

**HOLMBERG:** Page A8



Photos by David Samson / The Forum

An earthen dike is constructed to protect homes along 10th Street Northeast in Valley City on Monday.

## RISING, BUT REASSURED

### Recent rains have raised the expected crest of the Sheyenne River, but Valley City officials say they’re ready

Valley City, N.D.

Heavy rains brought a weekend scramble to protect Valley City from a rising Sheyenne River, but the mayor here said he feels “comfortable” with how they’re sitting now.

About two inches of rain that fell on the city and higher amounts to the north, at Baldhill Dam on Lake Ashtabula, meant a higher crest than what Valley City was looking at early last week.

Mayor David Carlsrud said the revised crest, with that added rain, went up about four feet. “That kind of kicked

Robin Huebner reports



things into action and there was a sense of urgency, but no panic,” he said.

Flood walls and clay levees began going up around town, and Carlsrud asked Fargo for more than 20,000 sandbags, since the city had no time to make its own.

The bags, made during Fargo Sandbag Central’s 2020 production, were on their way within



The floodwall near Riverview Drive is seen in Valley City on Monday.

hours, Carlsrud said, and college students and residents began placing them Sunday, April 24.

Carlsrud said after the

scramble, he’s feeling good about where they’re at.

**RIVER:** Page A6



Courtesy of Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library Foundation Oslo-based architecture firm Snøhetta sees the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library as a simple complement to the rugged North Dakota Badlands. The library will be built in Medora near the gateway to Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

## Waltons donate \$15M to TR library

### Contribution less than the expected \$50M, but fundraising still tops project goal

By Patrick Springer  
The Forum

FARGO — The \$50 million pledge from Rob and Melani Walton for the Theodore Roosevelt

Presidential Library turned out to be \$15 million, but fundraising nonetheless has exceeded the project’s \$100 million goal.

Ed O’Keefe, president and chief executive officer of the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library Foundation, confirmed that the contribution from the Rob and Melani Walton Foundation, whose wealth

comes from the Walmart fortune, has come in smaller than expected.

“The Rob and Melani Walton Foundation has been extremely generous,” and gave the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library Foundation \$15 million, O’Keefe said in a statement on Monday, April 25.

The Waltons’ contribution included \$10 million to support scholarship at

the Theodore Roosevelt Center at Dickinson State University and help with the presidential library’s obligations in return for a \$50 million endowment from the state of North Dakota.

Another \$5 million from the Waltons supported the presidential library’s initial efforts, O’Keefe said.

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### Today’s weather



42°  
27°

Mostly sunny  
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**SPORTS:**  
NDSU women’s basketball team undergoing radical transformation.  
**PAGE B1**

## ‘More cops, tough on crime’: Minn. Senate OKs public safety bill

By Dana Ferguson  
The Forum

ST. PAUL — The Minnesota Senate on Monday, April 25, voted 48-19 to advance a public safety plan that would put up more money for recruiting police officers and stiffen penalties for violent offenders in the state.

The roughly \$200 million plan would boost funding to local law enforcement agencies to help them recruit and retain more officers and

bring on additional equipment, set new criminal penalties for carjacking, organized retail theft and fleeing a police officer, and put in place tougher penalties for those who commit repeat offenses, especially for violent crimes.

It would also make public prosecutors’ charging decisions and judges’ sentencing decisions in an effort that GOP lawmakers said would help

**SAFETY:** Page A8

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# HOLMBERG

From Page A1

Forks County District Court. In an initial interview, Holmberg told The Forum he had read the story, but he later said he was unaware of Morgan-Derosier's child porn charges in a follow-up interview.

The state charges have been dismissed to make way for federal prosecution.

Holmberg, who recently changed his phone number, previously told a reporter he no longer had the text messages with Morgan-Derosier. "They're just gone," he said.

Five days after The Forum published its investigation, Holmberg resigned his leading role on Legislative Management, a powerful state committee that manages the Legislature's work between sessions.

In the wake of The Forum's story, a 2020 Twitter thread making sexual assault alle-



Forum News Service file photo

Sen. Ray Holmberg, R-Grand Forks, addresses members of the North Dakota House and Senate appropriations committees on Jan. 7, 2019.

gations against Holmberg gained new traction. Former North Dakota resident Caton Todd alleged he was sexually assaulted by Holmberg in 2010 after Holmberg invited the man to stay at his condominium in Florida.

Todd told Forum News

Service that Holmberg invited him to spend time at a Miami-area condo that Holmberg owned.

"We're investigating this," attorney Friese said. "That the two were acquainted and spent time together is not in dispute. Any accusations

of inappropriate behavior were in dispute."

Friese did not deny that Holmberg invited Todd to visit him in Florida. He also confirmed that Holmberg owned a condo in the Miami area at that time.

A spokesman for Gov. Doug Burgum said the Republican governor supports Holmberg's decision to resign, but he did not elaborate.

Senate Majority Leader Rich Wardner, R-Dickinson, said Holmberg made the right decision to step down because he wasn't running for reelection and the news reports served as a distraction not just for the Legislature, but for Holmberg.

Wardner said people will think Holmberg is resigning because he's guilty, but that is not necessarily the case. The Republican leader noted Holmberg has not been criminally charged, and he's "being tried and sentenced in the media."

"I think people need to remember that Sen. Holmberg has given a lot of time

and energy to serving North Dakota," Wardner added.

North Dakota GOP Chairman Perrie Schafer declined to comment on Holmberg's resignation. Schafer noted the party has not yet seen anything to suggest Holmberg is guilty of a crime.

North Dakota Democratic-NPL Chairman Pat Hart said Holmberg's decision to leave the Legislature "was not only the right decision, but really the only decision under the circumstances."

"North Dakotans need legislators they can put their full faith in to carry out their duties," Hart said in a statement. "This is a sad situation, and one that shouldn't be hanging over our state legislature."

Messages left for Grand Forks Mayor Brandon Bochenski and Grand Forks/East Grand Forks Chamber of Commerce CEO Barry Wilfahrt were not immediately returned Monday.

Contact Jeremy Turley at [jturley@forumcomm.com](mailto:jturley@forumcomm.com) or on Twitter at [@jeremyturley](https://twitter.com/jeremyturley).

# SAFETY

From Page A1

to make sentences for violent offenders more uniform around the state. They said Twin Cities area county attorneys had recently made sentencing decisions that they felt broke with the Legislature's intent and they sought to make more specific what lawmakers expected of them.

"This is not a time to build bigger bureaucracies, this is a time to react to the criminal threat that is endangering our citizens," the bill's author, Sen. Warren Limmer, R-Maple Grove, said. "It's time to let the people know what's really going on. I keep hearing from citizens almost every day, 'Why aren't they prosecuting?'"

The issue of public safety has been a top priority for lawmakers this year, as the state reported an uptick in violent crime. And Republicans and Democrats in the Legislature have put up different plans to address public safety issues in Minnesota. The Senate measure is expected to move next to a conference

committee, where legislators from the House and Senate will attempt to draft a compromise bill that can appease both chambers.

House Democrats have proposed a \$150 million public safety bill with targeted funding aimed at helping communities around the state with the highest rates of violence and increasing crime. The plan attempts to address the root causes of violent crime such as offering diversion programs for juvenile offenders and relying on community groups to deter violence. The bill is set to come up for a vote in the House later this week.

Republicans, who hold a majority in the Senate, said they were open to bridging the gaps in conference committee, but felt their approach was better at quelling violent crime in Minnesota. They also raised concerns about sending state money to community nonprofit groups that attempt to prevent violence and offer programming to young people.

"When it comes to public safety, we are open to any discussions that help keep people safe, help keep commu-

nities across the state of Minnesota safe," Senate Majority Leader Jeremy Miller, R-Winona, told reporters. "Our approach is very simple: more cops, tough on crime."

Senate Democrats on Monday attempted to bring their \$500 million public safety bill to the floor for a vote but couldn't put up the votes to do that. They also attempted to amend the Republican bill to eliminate a defense for those who assault LGBT people, create a reward fund for those who bring forward information on cases of missing and murdered Indigenous people, expunge some criminal records automatically after a certain amount of time and boost funding for the juvenile justice system but those efforts came up short or were withdrawn on the floor.

During the more than four-hour debate, DFL lawmakers said the proposal didn't do enough to prevent causes of crime and disagreed that harsher penalties would deter violent crime in Minnesota. And they disagreed with the GOP majority's spending priority to use much of the state's \$9.25 bil-



Dana Ferguson / Forum News Service

Minnesota Sen. Warren Limmer, R-Maple Grove, speaks with Capitol reporters about a public safety bill Monday during a news conference

lion budget surplus for a set of tax cuts, leaving less than they'd like to address public safety.

"This is a non-budget year, but the majority is spending a lot of money

in this non-budget year too, it's just in the tax bill, not in the bill to prevent crime," Sen.

Ron Latz, DFL-St. Louis Park, said. "This bill also has some propos-

als that are real clunkers that are feel-good but ineffective proposals. These proposals may make some people feel safer while not actually making them safer: buyer beware."

Both Democrats and Republicans have proposed boosting funding to public defenders in the state, who threatened to strike in March and ultimately renegotiated their contracts after they raised concerns about inadequate staffing and excessive caseloads. And they agreed to amend the bill to toughen penalties related to selling fentanyl and to offer benefits to the families of law enforcement officers who take their lives after battling post-traumatic stress disorder.

Follow Dana Ferguson on Twitter @bydanaferguson, call 651-290-0707 or email [dferguson@forumcomm.com](mailto:dferguson@forumcomm.com).

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# The Forum

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SATURDAY, MAY 7, 2022

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## Feds searched Holmberg's home, report shows

Agents seized discs, 'multiple other items'

By April Baumgarten  
The Forum

GRAND FORKS — Federal agents searched the home of North Dakota's longest-serving state senator and seized several items in November, less than three months after he exchanged text messages with a jailed child porn and child sex abuse suspect, according to a police report.

The police report, obtained Wednesday, May 4, by The Forum through a public records request, describes the

Nov. 17 search of Sen. Ray Holmberg's condo in Grand Forks.

A federal agent knocked on Holmberg's door at about 9:30 that morning and announced that law enforcement had a warrant to search his home, the report said. Holmberg answered the door and was present for the search.

A Grand Forks police detective helped with the search while federal agents interviewed Holmberg at his dining room table. The detective found "a couple" of CD-Rs and DVD-Rs in the drawer of a bedroom nightstand, according to the report. CD-Rs and DVD-Rs are discs onto which data can be recorded.

Along with the discs,

**SEIZED:** Page A11



Holmberg



Amber Gustafson holds her daughter, Emily, on the day she was sworn in as a Clay County judge in April 2018. Ruby, Walter and Adam also attended the ceremony.

Contributed / Amber Gustafson



Don Davis / Forum News Service file photo

Minnesota governor candidates Tim Walz and Rebecca Otto talk in front of a packed Minnesota state Democratic-Farmer-Labor party convention on June 2, 2018, in Rochester. They were trying, but failed to upend the endorsement of state Rep. Erin Murphy. Walz would eventually become governor — without the DFL's endorsement.

## DFL, GOP will pick favorites for governor soon. What do their endorsements mean?

By Alex Derosier  
The Forum

ST. PAUL — Delegates from Minnesota's two biggest political parties are gathering this month in Rochester for conventions where they'll endorse candidates for statewide offices including governor and attorney general.

It's a key step in an election year: Parties decide which candidates they will commit resources to ahead of the August primary, where voters decide who will go on the ballot for the November general election.

But the endorsement

**FAVORITES:** Page A12

## 'It simply doesn't work without Adam'

Widow reflects on life, loss, family 1 year after West Fargo police officer's sudden death

**West Fargo**  
It's been a very long year since the sudden and heartbreaking death of 40-year-old West Fargo Police Lt. Adam Gustafson. A year filled with grief, loss, adjustment and enormous community support.

"Adam was always smiling," said Amber Gustafson, Adam's widow. "He didn't get riled up about much. He was so funny. He could take difficult situations and find the humor in them."

Adam grew up in Long Prairie,



JIM SHAW

Minnesota, and spent his first two years of college at Minnesota State University, Mankato. He was so horrified by the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks that he left college and joined the Minnesota Army National Guard in 2001. He was deployed to Iraq in 2004 and spent seven years in the

Army National Guard.

"He loved being in the Army," Amber said. "He liked the camaraderie of it. He had a sense of pride in his country. He just loved America. I used to say Adam would paint the house red, white and blue if I let him."

Adam's time in Iraq convinced him to go into law enforcement. So, he finished college in 2008 with a degree in criminal justice from the University of North Dakota.

After training to

**REFLECTS:** Page A4

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### Today's weather

Partly cloudy, breezy  
Details, B12



\$3.00  
(Suggested retail price)  
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## Officials eye space near Sanford Medical Center for dispatch hub

By Barry Amundson  
The Forum

FARGO — The long-awaited new Red River Regional Dispatch Center project is moving ahead on several fronts, with a possible location in mind and architectural drawings underway.

Cass County Administrator Robert Wilson said they were hoping "to get some momentum going" on the project that will move the center away from downtown Fargo. The idea has been dis-

cussed for years. The center is a partnership between Cass and Clay counties, Fargo, West Fargo and Moorhead and is the first 911 operation in the nation that crosses state lines.

"There are a lot of moving pieces," Wilson said, including a draft of an updated joint powers agreement between the five partners, architectural drawings in progress, a potential location

**HUB:** Page A12

## FARMLAND FOR SALE

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**SALE PENDING:** 480 Acres, Barnes County ND Farmland between Kathryn, ND and Nome ND.

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**BUSINESS:**  
Proposed cat-coffee shop in Fargo would allow feline fans to get their 'cat-feine' fix.  
**PAGE C1**

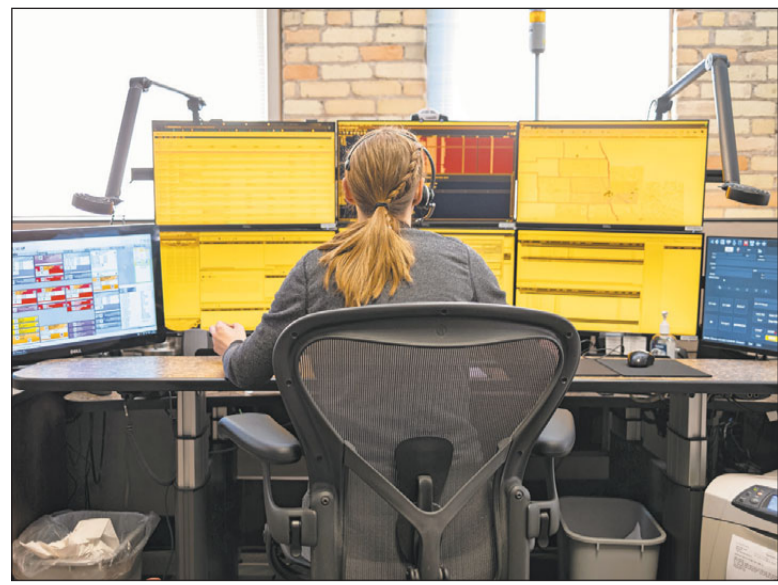
**HUB**

From Page A1

next to the Sanford Medical Center and a financial plan. Former Fargo City Attorney Erik Johnson provided the draft of the joint powers agreement two weeks ago based on previous discussions with all five partners, who are reviewing and providing comments. The St. Paul-based SEH architectural firm, which the county hired for the project, is progressing on potential facility layout and design options, Wilson said. He said Dispatch Center Director Mary Phillippi and County Commissioners Rick Steen and Mary Scherling met

with the firm to talk about balancing facility needs while being cost-conscious. A meeting is planned with Sanford about locating the center on a piece of their property near the hospital at 5225 23rd Ave. S., Wilson said, although other sites are still being considered. As for as who would own the facility, Wilson said it was Cass County's preference to pay the North Dakota portion of the construction costs so as to prevent any double taxation, with Fargo and West Fargo also having to contribute funds. There is also a possibility that Cass County could pay all of the construction costs, own the building and then work with Clay County and Moorhead on cost participation.

Wilson said this could be similar to how the regional detention center for juveniles works with Clay County owning the facility in Moorhead with participation from the local partners. All five partners currently pay for operations of the dispatch center, too. Cass County is the fiscal agent on the project and has been considering using federal COVID-19 relief funds to pay for construction. The current site is said to be overcrowded, and a Federal Emergency Management Agency report from a few years ago raised safety concerns about being near the railroad tracks and having windows that could be damaged in severe weather.



Forum file photo Operators at the Red River Regional Dispatch Center answer 911 calls in 2021.

**FAVORITES**

From Page A1

is no guarantee of success. Neither the current governor, Tim Walz, nor current attorney general, Keith Ellison, received the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party endorsement in 2018. Over the past 30 years, the endorsement has not been a reliable indicator of who will end up with a "DFL" or "R" next to their name in November, said Hamline University political science professor David Schultz.

So why does it matter? Schultz says there are a few ways the endorsement gives candidates a boost.

"One of them would be if you're facing a primary challenge, if you have an endorsement the party can commit resources to help you defend your endorsement and defend against challengers," he explained. "The second thing you would presume is to think that having the endorsement would chase away challengers within your own party."

But that doesn't always play out in the party-preferred candidate's favor. "It's somewhere between 50% and the coin toss," Schultz said. "At the end of the day, the party's nomination just doesn't seem to be as important as it should be in the theory."

Why might that be the case? People who are delegates to the state conventions are not necessarily representative of their party as a whole. DFL delegates are likely to be more liberal or progressive-leaning and Republicans are more likely to be more conservative than their average fellow party members.

"What winds up happening is people who

show up at the conventions, they're not representative of the broader party and that's part of why you're seeing the phenomenon that you're seeing," Schultz said.

**How are delegates selected?**

Who gets to decide who the Democrats and Republicans endorse? It starts at the precinct caucuses, the opening event in an election year in Minnesota. Local community members gather to choose delegates who will endorse candidates later on in the year. Precinct caucuses are also an opportunity for party members to discuss and introduce policy proposals to the party platform at the grassroots level.

Delegates nominated at the precinct caucuses then attend conventions for statewide and local elections, as well as legislative and Congressional districts, where they pick candidates to give the party endorsement.

Both the DFL and Republican statewide office endorsement conventions will be in Rochester this year. The Republican convention is May 13-14 and the DFL convention is May 20-22. Thousands will gather to decide the party's preferred candidates for governor, attorney general, auditor, and secretary of state.

Endorsements can give a candidate a big boost in a race, and candidates will sometimes pledge not to run in the August primary if they do not get their party's endorsement. But even if a candidate does not get his or her party's endorsement, they can still run in the August primary election.

In 2018, state Rep. Erin Murphy received the DFL endorsement for governor. But then-Congressman Walz pushed forward to the primary and ended up winning. Attorney General Ellison, who was also in Congress at the time, did not enter the 2018 race until after the DFL convention but ended up winning his primary. The party-endorsed candidate, Matt Pelikan, came in fourth place.

**Looking ahead**

With multiple candidates vying for 2022 endorsements for governor and attorney general, the Republican convention is shaping up to be the more interesting gathering.

It remains murky as to who has an edge in the governor's race, where five candidates are vying for the nomination.

Former state Sen. Scott Jensen has a fundraising advantage over his competitors, and had a significant edge in a straw poll at the state precinct caucuses in February, where he got 38% of 16,000 votes. Other candidates include Sen. Paul Gazelka, businessman and political outsider Kendall Qualls, and former Hennepin County Sheriff Rich Stanek.

Schultz said that while the outcome of the convention might not give much clarity on who will win the primary, an endorsement may give some indication of the direction of the Minnesota Republican Party.

"I'd be curious to see if they go with Jensen then the party is clearly going in a direction that would be in the wing of the Trump party, as opposed to Gazelka who

would be more institutional, the kind of candidate Trump people might run against," he said.

Another possibility is that the GOP will complete its convention without endorsing a

candidate for governor, further muddying the picture for the governor's race.

This year the DFL convention appears to be a straightforward one where incumbent candidates Walz, Ellison, as

well as Secretary of State Steve Simon and Auditor Julie Blaha will likely receive endorsements with no challenge.

Follow Alex Derosier on Twitter @xanderosier or email aderosier@forumcomm.com.

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THURSDAY, JUNE 9, 2022

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## Sanford, UND deny claims of sexual harassment

By Patrick Springer  
The Forum

FARGO — Sanford Health and the University of North Dakota filed legal responses denying a female medical resident's allegations that she was subjected to sexual harassment by the male physician who supervised the residency program.

The allegations were made in a lawsuit filed April 6 in U.S. District Court in Fargo by Dr. Fiona Axelsson, who was in the University of North Dakota's family medicine residency program supervised by Dr. Jason Myrmoe, a Sanford physician.

Axelsson, who started in the residency program in 2019, claimed in her lawsuit that problems with Myrmoe started in 2020.

The harassing behavior started with Myrmoe making comments such as "you're too emotional" and "get some sleep" and later involved openly "leering" at Axelsson, sometimes in the presence of others, her lawsuit said.

In its answer to the suit, filed Monday, June 6, Sanford made general and specific denials to Axelsson's allegations of sexual harassment, discrimination and retaliation.

Although Myrmoe acknowledged telling Axelsson to "tread carefully" about her claim

that he didn't care about the students in the residency program, Sanford denied that he engaged in any improper conduct, including "leering" at Axelsson.

Specifically, Sanford denied that Axelsson "continued experiencing harassing conduct from Dr. Myrmoe as alleged."

Axelsson's lawsuit alleged that Dr. Lara Lunde, who replaced Myrmoe as director of the family medicine residency program at Sanford, told an investigator that Myrmoe gave her an "unsolicited back massage in the presence of another medical resident and two nurses."

In response, Sanford denied Axelsson's allegation, but gave no specifics.

Sanford acknowledged that Axelsson engaged in conversations with Lunde, acknowledged that Axelsson complained to human resources regarding her interactions with Myrmoe and that it investigated the matter, but denied that Axelsson was subjected to harassment.

Also, Sanford acknowledged that it met with Axelsson to discuss the outcome of the investigation, "including matters raised by others," but denied that it informed her that Myrmoe "sexually harassed her."

**CLAIMS:** Page A8



Yana and her mother Natasha Stepanenko, 43, at a public hospital in Lviv, Ukraine, on Saturday, May 15, 2022. Both mother and daughter were injured in a missile strike while waiting to catch an evacuation train in Kramatorsk, Ukraine.

## Delivering courage

Fargo native on front lines in Ukraine creates nonprofit to help amputees

By C.S. Hagen  
The Forum

**T**he sights and stories Monte Schumacher sees and hears during his trips into Ukraine to help amputees are heartbreaking snapshots of an ongoing nightmare.

Crammed into military



A structure on fire in May 2022 after a bombardment in Pavolgrad, Ukraine, about 10 miles from the front lines.

hospitals, thousands of mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, injured soldiers, are without limbs. Young video gamers — now conscripted soldiers —

are flying altered drones fitted with bombs.

On the front lines, World War I style trenches are bombarded every day while young men in hoodies fill

ballistic vests with sand, hoping to stop Russian bullets.

Schumacher, a Fargo native who graduated from Shanley High School in 1979, first decided to start driving medical supplies into Ukraine from Poland when he discovered hundreds of people missing limbs during his trips.

Since the midnight invasion of Ukraine by Russia began on Feb. 24, there have been more than 9,151 civilian casualties in the country, with 4,169 killed and 4,982 injured.

**NONPROFIT:** Page A4

## Feds seized Ray Holmberg's state-issued devices

By April Baumgarten  
The Forum

FARGO — A former North Dakota lawmaker's electronics, including devices the state issued to him, were seized by federal investigators shortly after the lawmaker texted a jailed child porn suspect.

Retired Sen. Ray Holmberg's attorney Mark Friese con-

firmed to The Forum on Wednesday, June 8, that investigators seized some of Holmberg's electronic items and storage devices. That included some assigned to the former senator by the state that he used as a legislator, Friese said.

North Dakota Legislative Council Director John Bjornson said Holmberg turned in

several items on June 1, his last day as a lawmaker, including his State Capitol ID and parking pass. What was not turned in was a laptop and iPad the state issued to Holmberg, Bjornson said.

Holmberg, 78, announced in April he would resign after The Forum reported he

**HOLMBERG:** Page A8



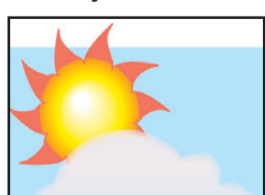
Ray Holmberg, a Grand Forks Republican, resigned from the North Dakota Senate on June 1, 2022. He's seen here addressing members of the state House and Senate appropriations committees on Jan. 7, 2019.

Forum News Service file photo

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### Today's weather



78°  
53°

Partly Cloudy  
Details, B8

**LIFE:** Country, kids' tunes, blues, bluegrass and rock on tap this weekend. **PAGE B5**

## North Dakota leaders have no plans to suspend gas taxes

By Jeremy Turley  
The Forum

**BISMARCK** — Several states have suspended their gasoline taxes amid record high prices at the pump, but North Dakota leaders say they have no plans to take similar steps.

Lawmakers in Georgia, New York and a handful of other states have recently approved measures to temporarily stop collecting state gas taxes, marginally

easing the strain of gas prices that have climbed in recent months amid disturbances in the oil markets and high rates of inflation.

Drivers in North Dakota were paying an average of \$4.62 per gallon of gas and \$5.35 per gallon of diesel as of Tuesday, June 7, according to AAA.

Top North Dakota legislators have not spoken about suspending

**TAX:** Page A8

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**TAX**

From Page A1

the state's 23-cent-per-gallon gas tax, said Senate Majority Leader Rich Wardner, R-Dickinson.

Wardner said lawmakers could take up the issue at the next regular legislative session starting in January, but he didn't foresee any action prior to that.

Mike Nowatzki, a spokesman for Republican Gov. Doug Burgum, said he's not aware of any proposals to halt gas tax collection. He forwarded Forum News

Service an article from the conservative-leaning Tax Foundation that referred to pausing the federal gas tax as an "ill-suited poli-



Jeremy Turley / Forum News Service

North Dakota's average gas price reached a record high of \$4.62 per gallon on Tuesday, June 7, but prices are marginally lower in Bismarck.

cy for addressing rising spending" because taking away from road maintenance funding would hurt drivers and the economy in other ways. Nowatzki added that Burgum has repeated-

ly urged the administration of Democratic President Joe Biden to "reverse course on its misguided domestic energy policies and unleash U.S. energy producers to increase domestic (oil) supply."

Biden has charged American oil producers with declining to take advantage of drilling permits already granted by the federal government.

North Dakota lawmakers killed legislation last year to raise the state's gas tax for the first time since 2005. The 23-cent charge sits more than a nickel below the national average. Gas tax collections are used to maintain roads and bridges across the state.

Contact Jeremy Turley at [jturley@forumcomm.com](mailto:jturley@forumcomm.com).

**CLAIMS**

From Page A1

Myrmoe resigned as supervisor of the residency program and returned to full-time practice, Sanford acknowledged, but denied any failure to investigate Axelsson's harassment allegations in a timely manner. Sanford also denied retaliating against Axelsson, and said she was not entitled to any lost income or other damages.

In its answer, also filed Monday, June 6, UND acknowledged investigating Axelsson's allegations. UND also acknowledged that Lunde told a Sanford investigator that Axelsson claimed Myrmoe "touched her shoulders in a public area while at work," but denied any allegations of harassment or discrimination.

"UND denies the allegations of retaliatory action and conspiracy," UND said in answering Axelsson's lawsuit.

Axelsson, whose residency contract wasn't renewed, claims she was retaliated against for her complaints of sexual harassment and has had mental health struggles as a result, becoming severely depressed and suicidal. She was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and substance use disorder, her lawsuit said.

UND denied Axelsson's allegation of breach of contract. No trial date has been set in the case.

Readers can reach Forum reporter Patrick Springer at 701-241-5522 or [pspringer@forumcomm.com](mailto:pspringer@forumcomm.com).

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**HOLMBERG**

From Page A1

exchanged text messages with Nicholas James Morgan-Derosier in late August. Morgan-Derosier, a 34-year-old from Grand Forks, was in the Grand Forks County Jail and faced state child porn charges at the time of the text exchanges.

Morgan-Derosier now is charged in federal court. The Grand Forks man is accused of sharing child porn and taking two children from their Minneapolis-area home to his house with intentions to sexually abuse them.

A federal prosecutor said during Morgan-Derosier's January detention hearing that a 77-year-old Grand Forks man asked or told Morgan-Derosier "he wants him to bring (Morgan-Derosier's 19- or 20-year-old boyfriend) over to his house to give him a massage," according to a transcript of the hearing. This was part of the prosecution's argument to show

Morgan-Derosier exploited people.

The 77-year-old man was not named, though Holmberg was that age at the time of the text exchanges. Records obtained by The Forum showed Holmberg and Morgan-Derosier exchanged more than 70 texts over a two-day period.

Holmberg previously acknowledged to a reporter that he texted Morgan-Derosier. The then-senator said it was about "a variety of things," including patio work Morgan-Derosier did for him.

When asked about the massage request, Holmberg told The Forum, "I don't know what you're talking about, OK?"

Holmberg said the texts were "gone" when asked if a reporter could review the messages. Jail officials and federal prosecutors have declined to disclose the contents of the text messages, citing the open investigation into Morgan-Derosier.

The Forum also uncovered a police report that said Homeland Security agents and a Grand Forks police detective

seized items from Holmberg's home in mid-November, including writable CDs and DVDs. The three investigators also worked on the Morgan-Derosier case. The police report did not give a reason for the search of Holmberg's home, which came less than three months after Holmberg's texts with Morgan-Derosier.

The Associated Press first reported that devices the state issued to Holmberg were seized by law enforcement. Holmberg referred The Forum's questions about the state devices to his attorney Friese.

"At one point, I was told the state property was being returned, but it apparently has not," Friese said in an email to The Forum. "I'll need to defer to Legislative Council for any comment regarding their property."

Bjornson declined to comment on why the laptop and iPad were not returned or whether law enforcement contacted the Legislative Council about Holmberg's use of state-owned electronics.

"Legislative Council and legislator communications are

protected under state statute," Bjornson said.

The state gave Holmberg a second iPad in November, which was returned this month, Bjornson said.

Before his resignation, Holmberg was the longest-serving state senator in the U.S. The Grand Forks Republican was a powerful legislator who chaired the North Dakota Senate Appropriations committee and Legislative Management.

Holmberg initially announced in March that he did not plan to run for reelection before his term expired at the end of this year, citing health issues including weakened cognitive abilities.

But 10 days after The Forum's April 15 story on the text exchanges, Holmberg announced his plan to resign June 1. That announcement also came after a report on a 2020 Twitter thread that alleged he sexually assaulted a North Dakota resident in 2010 while they were at the then-senator's condominium in Florida.

Readers can reach Forum reporter April Baumgarten at 701-241-5417 or [abaumgarten@forumcomm.com](mailto:abaumgarten@forumcomm.com). Follow her on Twitter @aprilbaumsaway.

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NEW DIGS:

Older Bison football players impressed by turf practice field, B1

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SUNDAY, AUGUST 7, 2022

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## 'Relentlessly creative'

Longtime Fargo TV news anchor, radio host and stage actor, Doug Hamilton, dies



Robin Huebner reports

Fargo friendly and familiar face and voice in the F-M metro as a longtime radio host, television news anchor and stage actor has died.

Doug Hamilton, age 72 of Fargo, died Friday, August 5, under the care of hospice at Sanford Medical Center.

Hamilton had fought acute myeloid leukemia, a type of blood cancer, since late May of 2021.

A memorial celebration is set for 11 a.m. Friday, August 26, inside Delmar J. Hansen Theatre at Minnesota State University Moorhead, Hamilton's alma mater.

Hamilton's son, Ben Hamilton of St. Paul, said he was grateful his dad was able to stay with him during breaks from treatment

at Minnesota Fairview hospital in Minneapolis over the past year or so.

"I got to know him in a deeper way than I ever could have imagined. Having had this time with him... I wouldn't trade it for anything," his son said.

Hamilton underwent a bone marrow transplant last fall from a donor described as a good match, but the transplant didn't "take."

He enrolled in multiple medical trials in an effort to beat the cancer and was prepared to join another one up until a few days before his death, his son said.

Longtime friend John Tandberg said he and Hamilton talked often.

**HAMILTON:** Page A3



Eric Hylden / Grand Forks Herald

Paul Christenson, mayor of Churchs Ferry, stands by a white weeping birch tree that he's hoping to be buried by when he dies. Christenson, 64, a lifelong resident of Churchs Ferry, says that he's liked the tree since he was young.

## THE END IS IN SIGHT

After 139 years, Churchs Ferry, North Dakota, to be dissolved

By Ingrid Harbo  
Grand Forks Herald

Churchs Ferry, N.D.

Paul Christenson has lived in Churchs Ferry his whole life. He plans to stay, even with the town's end in sight.

He has served as the town's mayor over two different stretches, first from 1987 to 1992, and again from 1999 to now. As the population of Churchs Ferry has fallen to only six people (Christenson says six live there, but a sign in town says seven), he has taken on more responsibilities, mowing, plowing and trimming the trees as a



A bell tower and a church marquee sign are all that remain 11 years after Zion Lutheran Church in Churchs Ferry closed due to flooding from the rising Devils Lake.

one man-city shop. Christenson, who has lived in Churchs Ferry

for 64 years, stayed through widespread flooding and a

government buyout of most of the town. He says he will remain there long after the town ceases to exist.

"Until I croak. I'm going to be buried under that big white tree over there" he said, gesturing toward a weeping birch near his auto repair shop.

On June 14, residents of Churchs Ferry voted 5-1 to dissolve the town. It means the tiny community — located northwest of Devils Lake — will no longer be recognized as an incorporated city, effective Sept. 1, ending a 139-year run.

**END:** Page A6



Contributed

Doug Hamilton sits with his son's dog Timber in July. Hamilton died Friday from a type of leukemia.

## Hutterite colony making improvements to 'intentional community'

By David Olson  
The Forum

HAWLEY, Minn. — The Spring Prairie Hutterite colony near Hawley recently secured an interim use permit for a project that will replace much of the colony's existing housing and infrastructure.

The permit comes in the wake of action taken by the Clay County Commission earlier this year, when they approved a

request from the colony to make "intentional communities" a permitted use in agricultural general zoning districts.

The Spring Prairie Colony, known officially as the Spring Prairie Hutterian Brethren, was established in the late 1970s and over time has grown to an estimated 260 or more members.

If the community incorporated, it would be the eighth-most popu-

lated community in Clay County, according to information that was part of a Clay County Planning Commission hearing on the Spring Prairie colony's proposal.

According to the colony's plan, the project will result in one multi-family housing structure built in four phases.

There will be fewer than 150 residential units, and there will be additions to three legs of the colony's

community center.

A new K-12 school will be built, along with parking and playground areas. Support structures including greenhouses, outbuildings and storage facilities will also be constructed.

Before changing the rules earlier this year, the county limited residential density to two homes per 40-acre tract, or up to 16 lots per subdivision.

**HUTTERITE:** Page A6



Forum file photo

The Clay County Courthouse is seen June 7, 2016, in Moorhead.

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### Today's weather



70°  
49°

Mostly Cloudy  
Details, B8

**BUSINESS:**  
FMWF Chamber Foundation receives \$9.62M grant.  
**PAGE A7**

## Morgan-Derosier faces life if convicted

Prosecutor: Man tied to former ND lawmaker sexually abused children

By April Baumgarten  
The Forum

FARGO — Federal prosecutors want to use evidence that suggests a man tied to a former North Dakota state senator sexually abused multiple children, sometimes with a former aide to a U.S. senator.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Fargo filed a notice on Monday, Aug. 1, that asks a federal

judge to allow the evidence to be presented at trial against 34-year-old Nicholas James Morgan-Derosier. The Grand Forks man's trial is set for Feb. 14 in Fargo and is expected to last seven to eight days, according to documents filed Friday.

**TRIAL:** Page A4



Morgan-Derosier

McHaney

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# The 988 mental health hotline is expanding

Rural areas still face care shortages

By Christina Saint Louis  
Kaiser Health News

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline's 988 phone number, which launched July 16, was designed as a universal mental health support tool for callers at any time anywhere.

But the U.S. is a patchwork of resources for crisis assistance, so what comes next isn't universal. The level of support that 988 callers receive depends on their ZIP code.

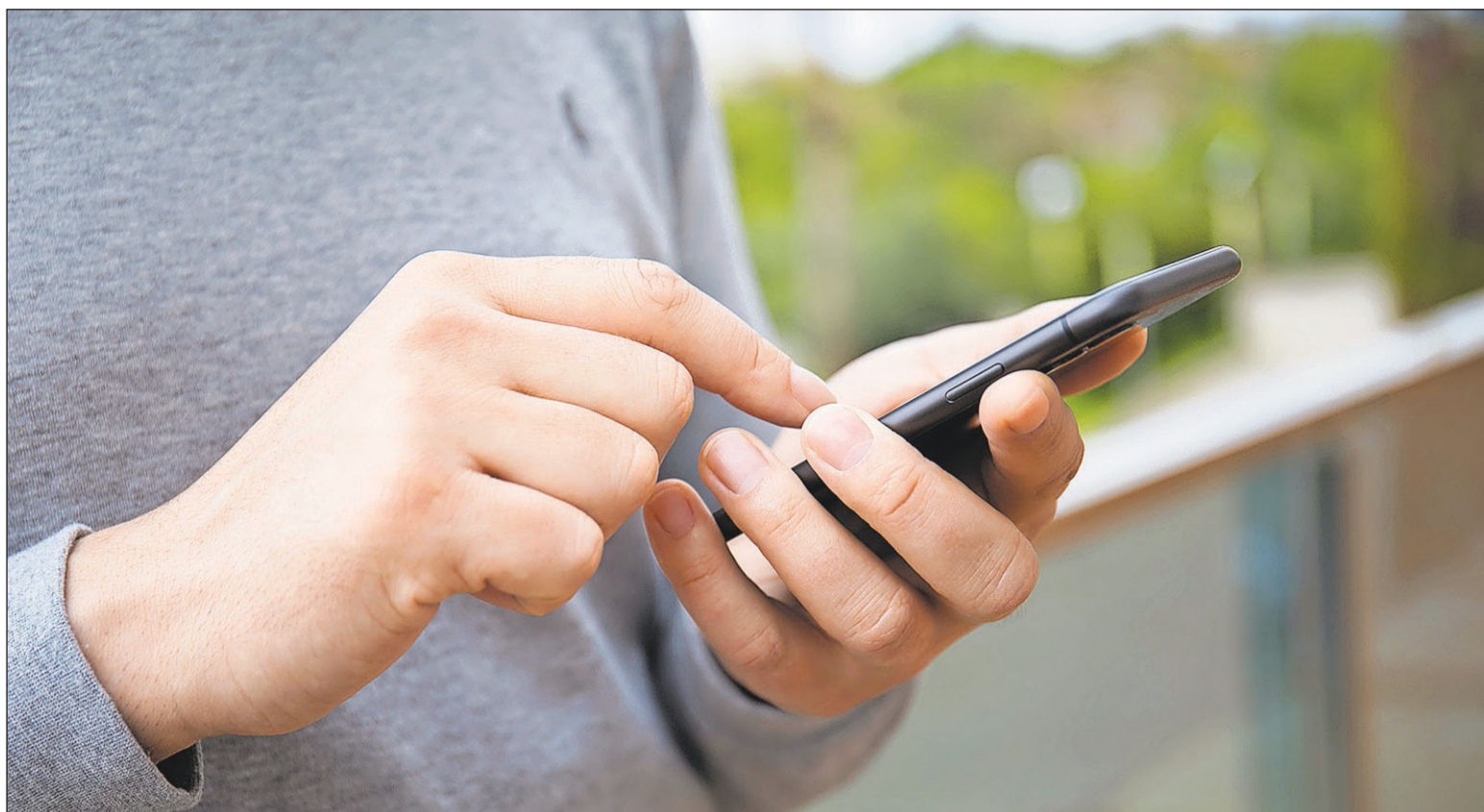
In particular, rural Americans, who die by suicide at a far higher rate than residents of urban areas, often have trouble accessing mental health services. While 988 can connect them to a call center close to home, they could end up being directed to far-away resources.

The new system is supposed to give people an alternative to 911, yet callers from rural areas who are experiencing a mental health crisis may still be met by law enforcement personnel, rather than mental health specialists.

More than 150 million people in the U.S. — most from rural or partially rural communities — live in places designated as mental health professional shortage areas by the federal Health Resources and Services Administration. That means their communities don't have enough mental health providers — usually psychiatrists — to serve the population.

The Biden administration distributed about \$105 million to states to help increase local crisis call center staffing for the new 988 system. But states are responsible for filling any gaps in the continuum of care that callers rely on if they need more than a phone conversation. States also shoulder most of the responsibility for staffing and funding their 988 call centers once the federal funding runs dry.

The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, which runs the existing 800-273-8255 lifeline that 988 expands upon, has said that a state that launches a successful 988 program will ensure callers have a mental health professional to talk to, a mobile crisis team to respond to them, and a place to go — such as a short-term residential crisis stabilization facility — that offers diagnosis and treatment. The federal agency also intends for 988 to reduce reliance on law enforcement, expand access to mental health care, and relieve pressure on



Dreamstime / TNS

The three-digit crisis hotline known as 988 rolled out nationally July 16.

emergency rooms.

Those objectives may not play out equally in all states or communities.

If a call center has no mobile crisis team to dispatch, "you don't have the stabilization, then you're basically going from the call center — if they can't meet your needs — to the emergency room," said Dr. Brian Hepburn, executive director of the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors. The group developed model 988 legislation for states that emphasizes the need for consistent services regardless of caller location.

For the new call system to be consistent, "you really need that full continuum of care," Hepburn said. "The expectation isn't that it's available now. The expectation is your state would eventually get you there."

But as 988 launched, most states had not passed legislation to fill gaps in mental health care.

## A challenge in South Dakota

In South Dakota, which has the eighth-highest suicide rate among states, health officials said responding to mental health crises in rural counties will be a challenge. So they plan to incorporate volunteer emergency medical services and fire department personnel into the emergency response to 988 calls on the ground. More than two-thirds of South Dakotans live in a mental health professional shortage area.

The state has only one professional mobile crisis team that responds to emergencies in person, according to South Dakota Department of Social Services

Cabinet Secretary Laurie Gill. The mobile response team is in South Dakota's largest city, Sioux Falls, and serves the southeastern corner of the state.

"Some of our communities have virtual mobile crisis teams," said Janet Kittams, CEO of Helpline Center, the South Dakota nonprofit that will answer the state's 988 calls. "Some of our communities have co-responder models. Some of our communities will do direct response with law enforcement. So it really does vary quite a bit across the state."

Sioux Falls is also home to one of the state's two short-term crisis facilities. The other is more than 300 miles away, in Rapid City. South Dakota also has 11 community mental health centers that assess patients and provide outpatient treatment. Those centers also use law enforcement agencies to respond to mental health crises.

A Helpline Center counselor could direct a 988 caller to one of those centers.

"Sometimes, yes, you will have to drive a couple hours to get to a community mental health center, but sometimes not," Kittams said. "Generally speaking, people who live in the rural parts of South Dakota very much understand that they potentially are going to have to drive to a resource, because that's probably true in the other aspects of their life, not just for mental health care, but for other types of care or resources that they need."

Helpline Center reported that its operators de-escalate 80% of calls without deploying a crisis team. But Vibrant Emotional Health, a nonprofit that co-administers

the nationwide lifeline, has projected a fivefold increase in calls for South Dakota in the first year that 988 is in place. Any spike in calls will likely increase the demand on crisis teams.

Vibrant has said that 988 will reach at least an additional 2 million people nationwide in its first year. Half of them are expected to come through the diversion of mental health-related calls from 911 and other crisis centers to 988.

Just next door to South Dakota, Iowa entered the 988 era with a more robust mobile crisis response system — "at least on paper," said Peggy Huppert, executive director of the Iowa chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Eighty-seven of the state's 99 counties have a mobile crisis provider, but most Iowans live in a mental health professional shortage area.

The remaining 12 counties — all rural — rely on law enforcement and emergency medical technicians, Huppert said.

"We still have a long way to go with properly training all first responders, especially law enforcement, because law enforcement are trained to come to a scene and take control of the scene," she said. "People who are in a behavioral health crisis, who are perhaps psychotic, sometimes they're hearing voices, they're hallucinating, they're in an altered state. They are not prone to obeying commands. That's where things often go sideways."

Officials at a 988 call center for nine counties in east-central Iowa operated by CommUnity Crisis Services said that their mobile crisis teams will be composed only of counselors but that law

enforcement agencies may be called if a team determines that's necessary for its safety.

CommUnity Crisis Services has three mobile crisis service providers who arrive in unmarked vehicles.

Adrienne Korbakes, chief operating officer at CommUnity, said the mobile crisis teams are a great option in rural communities where seeking mental health treatment might carry a stigma. And with 988, she said, "you can call or text or chat from the privacy of your own home — nobody has to know that you're accessing services."

To prepare for those contacts, CommUnity has nearly doubled its staff during the past seven months — expanding from 88 employees in January to 175 in July.

Despite the 988 preparations in Iowa and South Dakota, neither state's Legislature has funded the system long term. In the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020, Congress gave states the authority to cover 988 expenses by adding a surcharge to cellphone service, but most have not done so.

Only 13 states have enacted 988 legislation, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, with varying applications and prescriptions on the continuum of care.

In Iowa, Huppert said, "there's very much a wait-and-see approach."

KHN (Kaiser Health News) is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues. Together with Policy Analysis and Polling, KHN is one of the three major operating programs at KFF (Kaiser Family Foundation). KFF is an endowed nonprofit organization providing information on health issues to the nation.

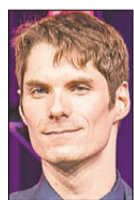
# Minnesota man makes breakthrough in stem cell research

By Travis Gulbrandson  
Alexandria Echo Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Patrick Walsh recently celebrated the fourth year of a business he co-founded, Anatomic Inc., which sells human stem cell-derived sensory neurons to pharmaceutical companies for the possible creation of new, nonaddictive painkillers.

Walsh, who grew up near Forada, Minnesota, earned a bachelor of arts degree in biology with a chemistry minor from the University of Minnesota-Morris, and a master's degree in stem cell biology from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. Biology is something Walsh has always been interested in.

"The whole language of biology was really interesting to me," he said. "Getting into stem cell biology is just a more



Walsh

specific language, and it's interesting, what it has the potential to do. It's still early days, but it's an exciting field."

He co-founded Anatomic Inc. with Vince Truong based on a discovery they made in the lab.

"They basically have cells in dishes and these cells are always in danger of being ruined, basically. Imagine it takes a year to make a car or something, and anything can go wrong in the middle (of it)," Walsh explained. "That's kind of what cell manufacture can be like."

Basically, you want the process to be shorter, and very efficient end-to-end, Walsh said.

"That means you can

get something out at the end that can be useful for something downstream relatively sooner without mistakes," he said.

To do this, "I kind of rebuilt from basic principles how to make certain cell types very quickly and efficiently so that you can rely on quality at the end," Walsh said.

He originally targeted dendrocytes, which help neurons do important functions.

"It's very difficult to make those from stem cells," he said. "The most difficult protocols or manufacturing schemes take about six months, so it's like, 'How do I take this six-month process and get it reproducible, get it shorter?' I studied that, and thinking about everything along the way, there's different parts to a process, and you focus on one part of a process and try to get improvements

to every part of a process."

The first part of that process takes 10 days in culture.

"What I was able to do in the academic work was to take that 10 days that everyone in the world has to go through and turned it into this 24-hour period by exploring the chemistry a little bit," Walsh said. "So that was a nine-day shortcut that we had that no one else had at the time because it was under development."

"When you get that 10-day shortcut, that gets you to day 11 in 24 hours, so you can focus on day 11 and find shortcuts there," he said. "Basically at the end of the day, what takes 35 days traditionally, we can do in about a week, and that helps tremendously."

As the company was developed, that process

was taken and focused on one neuron in the body, a sensory neuron which "allows you to sense the outside world," Walsh said. "Things like itch and pain and heat, it can notice that. People use that for understanding pain and figuring out new painkillers."

Walsh continued, "As we went out and spoke to people, it became clear that pharmaceutical companies were looking for ways to better understand human pain, so they were looking for nociceptors, or human sensory neurons."

The lab work ended up with what was thought to be a nociceptor, and input was taken from companies to understand what they needed and to see if they could get the cells to perform correctly.

"Eventually you collect all this data that says your cells do what

they're supposed to do, and the researchers and pharmaceutical companies will say, 'These seem to do what they're supposed to do,'" Walsh said.

A certain number of cells is required to do the necessary tasks.

"These aren't a renewable cell, so you use them in a test ... and then they have to buy more," Walsh said. "So we just keep making the cells, they keep using the cells, and that's how it works."

Walsh said the business could expand further with the development of different types of neurons.

"There's a lot of different types of neurons," Walsh said. "So if you can create new types of neurons and find out why they're useful for people, then you can scale that way."