

YANKTON DAILY PRESS & DAKOTAN

VOLUME 138
NUMBER 306

The Dakotas' Oldest Newspaper | **12 PAGES** | www.yankton.net

75¢



S.D. Experts: Expand Medicaid

Health Care Workers Say Lack Of Insurance Can Lead To More Expensive Care

BY CHET BROKAW
Associated Press Writer

PIERRE — A doctor, directors of medical facilities and other health care workers told a state task force Tuesday they believe South Dakota should expand its Medicaid program to provide health insurance to thousands more low-income people.

They said low-income people without health insurance now delay getting medical care until they are seriously ill because they know they cannot pay the bill. Those people

then wind up in emergency rooms and hospitals getting expensive care that could be avoided if they get earlier treatment, they said.

"They are the working poor. These are the people we are trying to help," said John Mengenhausen, CEO of Horizon Health Care, representing the community health centers that provide medical care to people with fees based on patients' income.

The 29-member task force of legislators, doctors, health care executives and others was appointed by Gov. Dennis Daugaard to

study the issue and identify the advantages and disadvantages of expanding Medicaid in South Dakota. The Legislature this year accepted the governor's recommendation to delay a decision on expanding Medicaid, the state-federal program that provides medical care to low-income people.

Daugaard did not attend Tuesday's meeting, but has said South Dakota has to study the issue because he is uncertain the federal government can afford to meet its pledge of paying most of the cost of expanding Medicaid.

Deb Bowman, a senior adviser to Daugaard and chair of the task force, said the group will not recommend whether South Dakota should expand Medicaid, but will instead identify the pros and cons of an expansion. The task force also will recommend the best way to expand Medicaid if the governor and the Legislature decide to do so.

The task force will hold several more meetings in the coming months before giving

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Cedar Co. Drill Targets Emergency Skills

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF
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HARTINGTON, Neb. — Kevin Garvin just knows that his next major event will be a disaster.

Then again, that's exactly what the Cedar County (Neb.) emergency manager wants.

Garvin is coordinating this Saturday's full-scale disaster exercise in Hartington, beginning around 10 a.m. All Cedar



County fire, emergency management services (EMS), law enforcement and emergency management have been invited to participate in the three-hour drill.

The responders can practice their skills and exercise Cedar County's emergency plans in a simulated setting that mirrors real-life conditions as closely as possible. Participants will respond just as they would if it were an actual emergency.

"This allows us to adjust our plans, identify the need for additional training, and learn from the event so that, when the real situation happens, we do not make critical mistakes that could cost people their lives," Garvin said. "The skills utilized by our emergency responders are a perishable commodity that must be practiced routinely in order to be maintained."

The county-wide drill is held every three years, following Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) guidelines. "This drill isn't federally funded," Garvin said. "But by following FEMA guidelines, this helps ensure that it's allowed for those who need continuing education credit."

Last week's major news events — the

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Transit Officials Offer Options



KELLY HERTZ/P&D
Tony Erickson, president of the Yankton Transit board, addressed concerned citizens Tuesday about future options for the transportation of school children in the community.

BY NATHAN JOHNSON
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During a public forum Tuesday night, parents said they like the service Yankton Transit has provided their children and expressed hope that a similar arrangement can be continued in the future.

The meeting at the Avera Sacred Heart Professional Office Pavilion was held in response to a recent Federal Transit Administration (FTA) ruling that found Yankton Transit, a non-profit organization that receives federal funding, was improperly providing exclusive school bus service to young student riders.

Earlier this month, the local agency implemented a plan that it believed was in compliance with FTA rules. However, problems with the Yankton Transit's scheduling software led to serious delays in picking up and delivering students. The situation left many parents angry and frustrated.

After further communication with the FTA, Yankton Transit was told that it could continue providing service as it had in the past until the end of the current school year.

In the future, the community could:

- create a separate, locally-funded school bus service that utilizes no federal funds. Tony Erickson, president of the Yankton Transit board, said that is not an option his organization is interested in pursuing. In effect, he stated that it would require the creation of a business entity that is completely separate from Yankton Transit so that no federal funds are utilized;
- use tripper service, which means children and school routes would be co-mingled with other routes and riders. This is the service that Yankton Transit briefly implemented this month. Parents have expressed concerns about this option because adults ride the same buses as young children, and arrival and drop-off times can vary.

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Wet Fields Mostly Welcome Sights

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Corn planting in Nebraska, Iowa and some other states is way behind last year, and that's just fine with many farmers in the drought-ridden corn belt where recent storms have left soils too soggy to work.

Recent rainstorms also have caused flooding in many parts of the Mississippi basin while preventing Nebraska corn farmers from getting into the field. Compared to last spring, when rain was in short supply, Nebraska farmers already had planted about 14 percent of their crop by this date.

But one year later, almost no Nebraska planting has been done — and little, if any, is expected by Monday.

"I can't say there isn't a field — or fields — planted in Nebraska, but it's not enough to

make a percent," Scott Keller, of the National Agricultural Statistics Service, told the Lincoln Journal Star (<http://bit.ly/WO275R>).

"We're in the same boat," said Greg Thessen with the service's Des Moines office told The Associated Press. "There may be a field planted here and there, but we don't add up to even a percent planted," he said Tuesday. Iowa normally has 14 percent of its corn planted by April 21, Thessen said.

The rains have markedly improved the drought situation in Iowa but hardly touched Nebraska's overall condition. The U.S. Drought Monitor maintained by the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln shows the eastern third of

Children's Author: Numbers In Literature Can Open Doors

BY ANDREW ATWAL
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After months of preparation, and responding to a local drive that collected 1 million soda pop tabs, renowned children's author David Schwartz was in Yankton Tuesday speaking to many of the schools in town.

Because many of Schwartz's books are based on the number 1 million, officials from the Yankton Reading Council, a group of school teachers and administrators, decided they would collect a million soda pop tabs by the time he came to Yankton. Officials will donate

the money collected from the pop tabs, around \$400, to the Ronald McDonald House in Sioux Falls.

"More so than the money, the community effort is so meaningful," said Kevin Miles, executive director of the Ronald McDonald Houses in South Dakota. "For families to step up and collect so many pop tabs means a lot to us."

Schwartz had a public speaking engagement Tuesday night at Yankton Middle School. His speech, titled "Anything Can Happen (Even Math) When Children Wonder About What They Read," dealt with how teachers and par-

ents can utilize the math woven into his many books.

"I loved wondering about numbers as a kid," Schwartz said. "When I would ride my bike, I would always start wondering how long it would take me to ride across the earth, or to other places."

One of Schwartz's most popular book, "How Much Is A Million," deals with making the number 1 million concrete for students and young children to understand.



KELLY HERTZ/P&D
Children's author David Schwartz uses the tongue of toy salamander to demonstrate proportion during a presentation at the Yankton Middle School auditorium Tuesday night.

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American Profile

* * *

City Looks At Funding Needs For Water Project

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the final part of a series that examines the City of Yankton's plans to upgrade its drinking water system.

BY NATHAN JOHNSON
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Yankton officials wish they could turn on a faucet and watch money pour out to pay for water treatment system upgrades, but that pipe dream quickly evaporates in the harsh light of reality.

They know it will take a community effort to pay for the project currently under consideration.

"There's no way of getting around that citizens are going to have to pay in one form or another," City Finance Officer Al Viereck said.

If the city were to build a collector well, upgrade Water Treatment Plant No. 2 and construct a new treatment plant, the cost of that investment is estimated to run up to \$29 million. The estimated price of upgrading the treatment system has nearly tripled in less than a decade as prices increase and more needs are found.

Viereck said that through incremental water rate increases during the last decade, the city has been able to set aside approximately \$3 million for future improvements.

But that is far short of what would be needed.

Currently, the City of Yankton is going through the application process to be eligible to borrow that money from the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) Program, which provides low-interest loans to governmental entities for clean water projects.

If that amount were borrowed, Viereck said, "the approximate annual debt service we're looking at is \$1.735 million (for a 20-year loan)."


To meet that projected expenditure, Yankton needs to find \$1.55 million in new annual revenue.

While the annual debt service could be lessened by taking out a 25-year or 30-year loan, that would add more interest payments, Viereck added.

He also pointed out that the city couldn't simply borrow \$26 million.

Under state law, the total amount of debt the city can take

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Erika Detweiler, MSW, CSW (left)
and Mary Carole Curran, Ph.D.

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