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City To Pursue Water Funding Options

BY NATHAN JOHNSON

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The Yankton City Commission narrowed down what options it believes should be used to pay for an estimated \$29 million in water system upgrades Tuesday.

However, before making any final decisions, the commission said it wants to hear public input on the matter and will hold a forum at 7 p.m. Monday, June 3, in the Technical Education Center.

"We would really like to have this room filled with people who have questions, so we can start answering some of the concerns the public has," Mayor Nancy Wenande stated. "(City Finance Officer Al Viereck) will be available to explain some of these different scenarios, as far as how they impact the business users as well as residential users."

The funding options presented by Viereck Tuesday were as follows:

- If all \$26 million were paid for via a property tax opt-out, the annual cost for the owner of a home with an equalized value of \$100,000 would be \$262. According to Viereck, some of the city's largest water customers are exempt from paying property taxes;
- If \$16 million were paid for via a property tax opt-out, the annual cost for the owner of a home with an equalized value of \$100,000 would be \$161.20. That would raise an estimated \$1.066 million. In addition, consumption rates would have to go up 14.1 percent to bring in an additional \$489,474 annually;
- If \$26 million were raised by a surcharge,



KELLY HERTZ/P&D

Yankton City Commissioner Charlie Gross weighs in during a discussion of options to fund water system upgrades at Tuesday's City Commission meeting.

that would add \$18.85 to the monthly bill of the average residential customer. A surcharge is an amount charged before a customer gets a drop of water. The new average bill would rise from \$24.18 to \$43.03, a 78 percent increase;

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Recent Rains Offer Big Boost

But Long-Term Drought Impact Remains Concern

BY ANDREW ATWAL

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Officials at South Dakota State University Extension say that the recent rainfall across the region has made a big impact on the drought across the state.

Around one inch of rain fell in Yankton over the weekend, with other areas in the state seeing as much as 10 inches on some crop acres, according to Laura Edwards, SDSU Extension climate field specialist.

She added that the trend in the region during the past several weeks has been significant drought improvement and the concern now is not for a short-term drought.

"There is a little bit of concern with the drought in the long term, due to soil moistures," Edwards said. "This could become more of an impact in the growing season. But, as of now, I'm not too worried about the drought in the Yankton area."

She added that the cooler temperatures are also impacting farming.

"The cooler temperatures impacts agriculture, gardens and those kinds of things," Edwards said. "Standing water is now one of the concerns we have from the weekend. Some of the flash flooding across the state could impact water ponding up in fields."

She added that flash flooding can erode soils in a field and move seeds around, which could result in farmers needing to replant their crops.

"Longer-term flooding in a field brings on different issues and can hurt any kind of crop that's starting to grow there," Edwards said. "Any standing water that is emerged in a field for longer than two days is an item concern. If that's the case, farmers need to look at that and consider what they can do, as far as replanting."

She also cautioned that farmers looking at the National Drought Monitor might not see a change in the drought level for several weeks.

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Thune Says He Supports Arming Of Syrian Rebels

BY DAVID LIAS

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VERMILLION — Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., quietly laughed Tuesday morning, when asked about the surprise visit his colleague, Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., paid to Syria on Monday.

"John makes some trips over there ... he goes places that most people don't get access to," Thune said.

However, Thune voiced support for a policy that appears to contain guidelines that McCain believes the U.S. should follow concerning Syria.

"He (McCain) is very passionate about getting a good outcome there," Thune said.

Sen. Thune was in Vermillion Tuesday to address the morning session of Girls State, which is meeting this week on the University of South Dakota campus.

According to news reports, McCain quietly slipped into Syria for a meeting with anti-government fighters Monday. The visit took place amid meetings in Paris involving efforts to secure participation of Syria's fractured opposition in an international peace conference in Geneva.

McCain, a member of the Armed Services and Foreign Relations committees, favors providing arms to rebel forces in Syria and creation of a no-fly zone. He has stopped short of backing U.S. ground troops in Syria.

"I think he (McCain) really wants to help the people who are leading the resistance in Syria, and I've always believed, as a matter of principle, that it makes more sense for us to arm and support the resistance than it does for us to put troops on the ground, to put our men and women in uniform in a place like that," Thune told the *Vermillion Plain Talk* Tuesday morning. "If we can give the necessary equipment, training and weapon systems, that's the best way to shape and influence an outcome in an area in a direction that we would like to see it go."

There are no easy options when formulating U.S. foreign policy towards Syria, he added.

"In this case, it's gotten more complicated because as time has passed the elements of the opposition have changed. Now you've got al-Qaeda in there, of course, Hezbollah is in there, and the Iranians are in there on the side of (Syrian President Bashar) Assad and the regime," Thune said. "But, there are a lot of folks in the opposition now, so it's hard to know who you are arming. Who are you giving arms to, and what is there objective and their purpose?"

Thune hopes that, eventually, the U.S. can lend its support to an opposition group in Syria "that is aligned with the forces of democracy and freedom that want to make a difference for human rights in

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DAVID LIAS/VERMILLION PLAIN TALK

Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) fields questions from the delegates during her appearance at South Dakota Girls State Tuesday at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion.

Thune To Girls Staters: Stay Rooted In Your Beliefs

BY TRAVIS GULBRANDSON

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VERMILLION — Sen. John Thune said that if someone enters politics, they must maintain their character and moral strength.

This was among his messages to the attendees of the 67th annual South Dakota Girls State, which is being held at the University of South Dakota this week.

"If you know who you are and you know what you believe, you stay anchored and grounded in that," Thune said Tuesday morning during a presentation at Aalfs Auditorium. "A lot of times temptations will come at you, or you get buffeted by a lot of various challenges people face in public life, it keeps you kind of grounded."

"That means you've got to stay really rooted in your beliefs and the principles that are important to you," he said.

Thune said the things that keep him most anchored are his family, community and state.

"I've spent a lot of time here in South Dakota, and it's very easy for people to go to Washington, D.C., and ... kind of forget

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Marty School Already Feeling Federal Cuts

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF

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MARTY — With budget cuts already under way, a Marty Indian School official fears the impact of the federal sequester on his students and staff.

The tribally-owned and operated school receives federal funds from the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). The school enrolls around 300 students, predominantly from the Yankton Sioux Tribe.

Superintendent Mike Elsberry has ordered his administrators to cut their budgets 5 percent for 2013-14. With no sequester solution in sight, the superintendent believes this first round of 2013-14 cuts may only signal the beginning.

Elsberry said his students and staff — and those at BIE schools across the country — are victims of the political and budget gridlock in Washington.

"I'll be entering my fourth year at Marty on June 1 of this year," he said. "I am now 43 years in my educational career, and I've never been more angry than I am at this time."

In laying out his budget demands to Marty school administrators, Elsberry insisted the 2013-14 cuts not include any

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