



It's hard to believe we are already at the halfway mark of this year's legislative session. Thank you to everyone who attended the legislative coffee sponsored by the Vermillion Area Chamber and Development Company and their Government Affairs committee. District 17 is fortunate to have such great community involvement and interest.

On the Senate side, there have been 220 bills introduced this year, 18 of which have already made it to the Governor's desk and been signed into law. By the time we reach cross-over day, all 220 bills will have had a hearing in one of the Senate committees.

During the legislative coffee last Saturday, someone asked when they should share bill suggestions. The answer is that any time is a good time, with the understanding that good bills take time. Sometimes, the bill ideas are for a significant change, and occasionally, the bills may only need to make a minor change that can make a big difference.

Senate Bill (SB) 188 and SB 124 made small but significant changes to the Rural Access Infrastructure Fund (RAIF). The RAIF was created in 2021 and set aside funding to assist counties and organized townships with maintenance costs for small bridges and culverts - essential for maintaining good roads. The RAIF has been very helpful to rural townships in Clay and Union counties, giving much-needed financial assistance. The law included a provision that money not spent within four years must be returned to the fund. Since the RAIF was a new program, there has been a learning curve, including the program's existence, the requirements and criteria to qualify, and the time for the counties and townships to identify projects and get started. In working with our rural communities, I brought SB 188 for consideration. The bill extends the deadline for when funds need to be spent on infrastructure projects before unspent funds need to be returned to the RAIF. SB 188 allows

the counties and townships more time to use the monies as they were intended effectively without fear that some of the monies may have to be sent back to the state fund. It helps these communities and, importantly, does not ask for additional money. SB 188 passed the Senate unanimously and will now go to the House for consideration.

The other change to the RAIF was in SB 124. The bill broadens the eligibility to qualify for the funds by including the small structures that need repair, even if they are located on minimum maintenance roads. It also received unanimous support from the Senate.

Last week, the Senate also supported SB 97 & 98, which adopts Federal Rules of Evidence 413 & 414. The two rules are used in Federal Court to admit evidence that the defendant committed other sexual assaults or child molestations that should be considered in a trial when a person is accused of sexual assault. SB 97 & 98 would grant South Dakota trial judges the discretion to admit the evidence. The proposed rules would add necessary tools for the prosecutors to give juries the most complete relevant information to make informed decisions. The bills passed the Senate and have been referred to the House Judiciary Committee.

It was wonderful to welcome a familiar face to the Capitol. Last week, Dr. Mary Jo Olson, Vermillion, served as the Legislature's Doctor of the Day. I have the privilege of working with her! Dr. Olson is board-certified in Family Medicine and specializes in obstetrics, gynecology, newborn and pediatric care, women's health, and preventive and adult medicine. She is also a hospice medical director, FARM Program site coordinator, and clinical faculty member at the [USD Sanford School of Medicine](#). In 2022, Dr. Olson was awarded The Edward J. Batt, MD, Memorial Teaching Award for excellence in family medicine teaching. Dr. Olson is also an USD alumni.

We celebrated USD Day at the Legislature. Students, faculty, and staff joined USD President Sheila K. Gestring in the President's Leadership Program and Presidents' Executive Leadership Institute. Both groups could watch the legislative process at work and learn how state government interacts with South Dakota's campuses.

As your representative in Pierre, your opinions, questions, and concerns about our State's business are very important to me.

Because of the volume of emails legislators receive, I prioritize emails from District 17 residents. You can help out by including where you live in your email. Contact me at [Sydney.Davis@sdlegislature.gov](mailto:Sydney.Davis@sdlegislature.gov)