



We've completed week seven of the 99th Legislative Session. This past week, we celebrated Crossover Day, when each chamber needs to have completed work on bills introduced in their chamber. This year, to mark the day, the members of the Senate dressed in blue for colon cancer awareness and to honor Senator Mike Diedrich, who has been battling the disease.

The majority of the focus in the remaining weeks will be on the budget and determining the State's spending priorities. There will also continue to be action on bills that set policy for the State.

An issue that has been watched closely by the ag community, the foreign purchase of ag land, was addressed in HB 1231, a bill that restricts foreign entities from purchasing agricultural land. The bill establishes a prohibited list that identifies countries such as China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, Venezuela, and Cuba from buying any agricultural land. Current law allows foreign persons and governments to purchase up to 160 acres. This limit stays in place for countries not on the prohibited list. As proponents of the bill have said, "We are up for trading our cattle, corn, and beans. But we are not up for trading our land." Many South Dakota ag organizations have been active in helping put this bill together. HB 1231 passed the Senate on Friday.

HB 1135 is another bill that protects South Dakota agricultural producers. The bill modernizes language pertaining to grain buyers to reflect the complex business of grain buying. Current law only protects South Dakota farmers if their grain is delivered out-of-state and the buyer becomes insolvent. HB 1135 will extend protections for SD farmers beyond our State's borders. The bill also clarifies that an offer to buy grain, once accepted, is a contract, and anyone who contracts to take title to grain is subject to SD's grain buyer laws. Farm groups have said the changes HB 1135 makes are good for the agriculture industry and farmers. The bill has passed both houses and has been sent to the Governor for her signature.

Another ag landowner bill that passed the Senate this week was SB 173, which would provide resident landowner-on-own-land licenses for prairie elk. The herds of prairie elk have been growing and as their numbers grow, the elk are migrating east. These animals eat food ag producers are using to maintain their livestock. SB 173 will allow ag producers the opportunity to help with elk depredation and protect the investment they make in their own operation. The House will now consider the bill.

My bill to help improve access to eye care by allowing optometrists to perform a limited number of additional procedures while still putting patient safety first with the strictest requirements in the nation for the provider has passed both the House and Senate. HB 1099 adds five procedures (3 specific injections and 2 specific laser procedures) and Intense Pulsed Light Therapy to the scope of practice for these community healthcare providers. Optometrists are educated, trained, and competent to perform these procedures. They deal with these issues every day, and we need to allow the competition in the market to provide access. It will reduce wait times for appointments and expand the patient's choice of provider. The bill now goes to the Governor.

This week, I also had the opportunity to offer a Senate Commemoration in honor of Elk Point resident Coach Ben Irlbeck for his service to and promotion of his community and the sport of golf. Coach Irlbeck led the Briar Cliff University women's golf team to the 2023 GPAC Championship.

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.