

## Poor S.D. residents hit hardest by state debt collection efforts

Nick Lowrey  
South Dakota News Watch

Thousands of South Dakotans have lost their privileges to hunt, fish, or drive in the state since 2016 because they owe money to government agencies for unpaid fines, fees or even college tuition, but often the people hardest hit by state debt collection efforts are low-income residents who are the least able to pay up.

The license and registration suspensions were implemented by the state debt Obligation Recovery Center, known as the ORC, as part of its efforts to collect money owed to government agencies.

Under state law, anyone who owes \$50 or more to a government agency shall not be issued a hunting license, fishing license, state park entrance pass or be able to make a state park camping reservation. Driver's licenses and annual vehicle registrations can be suspended if the debt is greater than \$1,000.

State officials say the license and vehicle registration suspensions are a necessary tool to collect more than \$80 million owed to state agencies and departments for debts due to outstanding fees, fines and unpaid taxes.

Scott Bollinger, commissioner of the state Bureau of Administration that oversees the ORC, said debt sanctions are a way for state government to pressure people who owe money to pay up and can help keep costs down for those who

do not owe money. For example, Bollinger said that collecting debts owed to the Board of Regents, one of the top recipients of ORC debt collections, can help keep down the price of tuition at public universities.

"Ideally, if everyone paid their debts we'd probably have lower tuition rates, sales tax rates, whatever," Bollinger said.

Created after a tough fight by the 2015 state Legislature, the ORC acts as state government's central debt collector. By June 30, 2019, state agencies had sent 122,353 individual debt accounts to the ORC. So far, since beginning operations in 2016, the center has brought more than \$8.7 million worth of recovered debt into state coffers, according to its most recent annual report. Meanwhile, debtors owing millions more dollars to the state have entered payment plans to satisfy their debts.

During the 2019 fiscal year running from July, 1 2018 to June 30, 2019, the ORC informed 18,000 people they'd be blocked from purchasing a hunting or fishing license in the state. Additionally, 3,000 people were notified that they wouldn't be able to renew their driver's licenses and vehicle registrations that year unless they paid their debt in full or started a payment plan.

Bollinger is responsible for keeping tabs on ORC operations. He said the center has helped boost the state's fiscal bottom line without costing taxpayers a dime because the independent contractor that

operates the ORC doesn't get paid unless the state does first.

"If you look at the raw numbers, we collect a lot more than we used to," Bollinger said.

In states bordering South Dakota, most of which have a state income tax, governments use the threat of not sending out all or part of an annual tax return to compel residents who owe debts to pay up. No neighboring states, including Wyoming, which like South Dakota does not have an income tax, use the threat of loss of licenses to push debtors to pay up.

The South Dakota court system has, so far, been the largest beneficiary of the ORC's efforts. A total of around \$3.67 million has been collected for the courts since 2016. In fiscal 2019 alone, \$1.48 million worth of court-ordered debts was collected. A large portion of that

Poor residents  
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### WEATHER

Robert Cole - Official  
Weather Observer

	HI	LO	PR
Aug. 27.....	75	52	.15
Aug. 28.....	65	50	0
Aug. 29.....	73	49	0
Aug. 30.....	73	49	0
Aug. 31.....	72	51	.05
Sept. 1.....	63	58	0
Sept. 2.....	76	61	0
2019 precipitation to date 26.98			
2018 precipitation to date 12.82			



Clark High School Homecoming 2019 is Friday, October 4. The C.H.S. alumni committee is finalizing plans for this big event.

Clark High School alumni committee members include: front row, left to right Cassi Kottke, Megan

Merkel and Melanie Smith. From left to right in the back row are, Kelsi Bell, Jerry Hartley and Jason McHenry. Committee members not pictured include Bonnie Graves and Sharon Larson.

## Clark High School Alumni Association gearing up for Homecoming 2019

The Clark High School alumni has three newsworthy items to publish and promote.

The biggest news is that the All-School reunion will be held in con-

junction with Homecoming 2020, on Friday, September 11.

In gearing up for Homecoming, starting in 2019, the Clark Alumni have a (class) banner promotion.

Thirdly, one Alumni Association will be involved going forward. Previously there had been two groups.

Alumni  
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## Safety emergency drills are ongoing at Crocker Wind Farm



A 'great help' participated in the mock emergency drill held at the Crocker Wind Farm last Wednesday. Groups attending were the Clark County Ambulance, Clark Fire Department, Bradley Fire Department, the

Clark County Sheriff's Department and the Wanzek Construction team. A patient with a broken leg and trauma is loaded into the Clark County Ambulance.

A safety emergency drill was held last Wednesday at the Crocker Wind Farm. Geronimo Energy with subcontractor Wanzek Construction is erecting 77 wind turbine towers this summer in northern and north-west Clark County.

"Basically, this drill was put together for all local first responders," said Clark County Ambulance Administrator Randy Angermeier. Bradley Fire Department, the closest entity, was first on the scene, along with the Clark Ambulance Department, the Clark Fire Department and the Clark County Sheriff's Department.

This is the second of multiple safety drills required through the process of this construction, noted Angermeier and he explained that as the construction progresses, the drills will be different in nature, covering different facets of the construction process, such as turbine sites, tower building and attaching blades through crane work.

Wednesday's scenario involved a worker with a compound fracture who had fallen from the turbine. This individual was hurt in the tower, so had to be lowered from the

tower. Because of the fall he had a compound fracture, leg trauma and was bleeding excessively.

The trickiest, most difficult aspect of this drill is the coordinating of getting the first responders to the accident site.

With 77 turbine sites in a remote area, it literally is a maze of roads, with addresses during construction temporarily seen, at best.

"Wanzek did a great job directing us to the accident," said Angermeier and he stressed that at the first accident drill dust was a factor so the water truck was out to wet down the gravel roads.

"All accompanying roads are covered with stations employees must report to and part of the employee training is the road coordinating. Wanzek knows the (road) positioning and they direct us in. They thought the timing by our groups was great," he explained and then detailed this safety drill. The two main Wanzek employees involved in the safety drills are Kyle Buffington, the assistant project manager and Chris Thomas, Construction

Crocker Wind Farm  
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## Grace Lutheran Church in Willow Lake to celebrate 125 years

The Grace Lutheran Church in Willow Lake is celebrating its 125th anniversary this Sunday, September 8, 2019.

An anniversary service is being planned which will be led by Pastor Bryan Taffe at 11:00 a.m. A coffee and muffins fellowship will begin at 9:45 a.m. Following the service will be a potluck meal, family activities and music by Leland Harding III and Family Tradition.

The Grace Lutheran Church had its early beginnings in the 1880s. Its members were part of the first Lutheran congregation in Willow Lake.

The Reverend Anders Nilson from Watertown drove a horse and buggy to Willow Lake for services and baptisms up until 1892.

The Scandinavian Evangelical Lutheran congregation of Willow Lake was organized in 1883.

In 1894, the West Willow Lakes Grace Lutheran  
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The Grace Lutheran Church in Willow Lake will be celebrating its 125th year as a congregation this coming Sunday, September 8, 2019.

Pastor Bryan Taffe along with student pastor Colin Beveridge will celebrate with church members at an 11:00 a.m. service preceded by a light breakfast fellowship at 9:45 a.m. A



potluck dinner and special music will follow the service. The current church building is the third church built for the congregation in 1966. Before the first church in 1904, services were held in homes, in school houses and the Rayla and Lee and Schmidts halls in Willow Lake.