

Will ND lawmakers regulate AI Industry?

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Planting fields with computers

AI is powered by data centers — facilities lined top to bottom with powerful computers that store, process and transmit digital information in the form of data.

Used for services from cryptocurrency mining to AI, they are highly secure and require highly technical jobs.

North Dakota has been incentivizing data center development for years. The state's cold climate, proximity to fiber optic networks, unfettered access to natural resources and flat topography position it well for housing AI data centers.

Facilities used for AI take a significant amount of energy compared to those used for other services.

Incoming legislation seeks to further attract companies by creating funding models that would cover some of the costs required to operate AI, also known as "compute credits." The same legislation would establish an entity similar to the Energy and Environmental Research Center (EERC) at UND to oversee the industry's research and development.

During an August Public Service Commission conference surrounding only the topic of data centers, the state Department of Commerce discussed AI projects individually valued at \$135 billion.

Power demands would be loads equivalent to more than the output of six Coal Creek Power Stations and over 30 times that of the biggest existing data center in the state.

But North Dakota doesn't have enough power or transmission capacity to build projects of such magnitude.

"There is a huge amount of power needed, and that's typically when the AI centers are using graphical processing units, they require typically 10 times the power of a normal computer server," Christy said.

To compensate for statewide power deficiencies, the same legislation would cushion a partnership between the state's oil and gas industry with data centers to harness gas flaring as an energy source. Data centers would essentially have their own power plants.

'Local control'

How and where data centers would be built are decisions left to local leaders, Christy said.

The facilities are currently regulated only through county-level zoning permits, namely those of conditional use that rezone agricultural land for industrial use.

"I want them to have that freedom, as well. I don't want to stifle what can and can't happen because me in Fargo is different than a representative from out west," he said. "I just want to keep that control local, but I truly hope that they do it responsibly."

One AI computing company called Applied Digital built a 180 megawatt cryptocurrency optimized data center in Ellendale, N.D., and is now completing an advanced AI facility designed to house the latest generation of NVidia processors. To house the large workforces, the company is building a cluster of new homes on the south side of town.



Applied Digital's Ellendale campus, looking toward the southwest (photo via Applied Digital's X account)

Mayor Don Flaherty calls the project a "success" and feels optimistic about the prosperity it could bring to the town that has a population hovering at about 1,000.

"This is an opportunity for our community to secure its future well into the next century," Flaherty said.

Though, residents still tell him they're wary of farmland being planted with computers.

"I don't think it (local opposition) has to do with it being a data center. I think it has to do with it being something so new, and how it's going to make a radical change to our community," Flaherty said. "Unfortunately, if you look at the way things have been over the last 20, 30, 50 years, you're going to see that our community has continued to deteriorate, like many small rural communities have been."

A bigger data center that functions similarly but is specialized for cryptocurrency received through backlash from locals and power companies despite being zoned according to state law.

Atlas power's 200-megawatt cryptomining data center in Williston caused rate spikes for Montana-Dakota Utilities customers, which led the utility provider to file a complaint with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

The buzz and whirs of the facility also caused 22 local residents to file a lawsuit against the company, which will go to trial in April.

How residents coexist with data centers is largely dependent on the way companies approach North Dakota communities, Williston Mayor Howard Klug said.

"And that's where you do your due diligence as county leaders or city leaders, and make sure that they've (the companies) got a lot of capital behind them," Klug said.

Christy, Flaherty and Klug all agree that like the rise of the internet, the rise of AI is inevitable, and they'd rather have it operating domestically than on foreign soil.

"Once people understand exactly what these data centers are, it won't be so much 'not my backyard' anymore," Klug said.

North Dakotan's interested in providing input to lawmakers who will vote on the AI-related bills can provide testimony in written or in-person form.

Residents can also reach out to their local lawmakers. More information on both options can be found on the Legislative Council website.

Readers can reach *Forum* reporter Peyton Haug at 608-397-6073

Feature stories from pages past: National evangelist stresses love of Jesus at local banquet

Dickey County Leader, May 4, 1978

"... if you know her Lord, like I know her Lord, then she's just your sister and mine."

With those words, Roy H. Wead, President of Trinity Bible Institute, introduced this year's college-community banquet speaker last Thursday night. And as she took her place behind the podium, she was greeted by a crowd of about 1,000 people, all clapping enthusiastically, all saying hello with their hands to Ruth Carter Stapleton, a nationally known evangelist and sister to the president of the United States, Jimmy Carter.

"It's good to visit you," she says, "to share in Jesus." Her voice carries well over the Bible college's address system; her tone is soft, varied by southern accent, but all the while stressing the love of God that's been given through Jesus to man.

She speaks of what she identifies as spiritual truth: that He, Jesus, is the Son of God; that He has dominion over heaven and earth, as well as the problems that confront people. Through Jesus' dominion people have a way to handle anger, illness, and anxiety. She says there are no accidents in God's kingdom.

And throughout her address, she quotes scripture, making it as much a part of the message she gives as it is part of the Bible, never taking away from the Holy Word, but explaining it in ways so anyone can make it a part of their daily life. It is her way of explaining "what it really means to be a Christian, not on Sunday, but in everyday life." God's purpose for man, she says, is that "each one of us can be transformed into an expression of perfect love. That is what the Christian walk is about."

The audience takes to her message. She admits to personal imperfection, to being human; "many times I saw I wasn't what I wanted to be," but that by identifying with Jesus "I can be all things, and out of him I am just a wreck."

Earlier that evening, in front of clicking journalists' cameras and the beat of slow fire questions coming from area media personnel, Mrs. Stapleton tried to define what she is and the type of beliefs that play a part of her Christian life.

Difficult
Being in the public eye wasn't

easy once her brother Jimmy came to the political forefront. After being involved in evangelistic work for 21 years, after having Christianity as a part of her entire life, "all of a sudden this happens... and everything is concentrated on us as it relates to Jimmy."

She writes books because he is the president, "and ignore the fact that I was writing books back in 1960." Her work," Mrs. Stapleton explained, "centered on a person coming into balance physically, emotionally, and spiritually, involving not just a religion, but the whole person."

As to the greatest need of the individual American today, she says it is the same thing for the rich or poor, or for those who are in power in Washington: "coming into a sense of self-acceptance and a feeling of self-worth. I think everything really stems from there." The scripture verse that says love God and love your neighbor as yourself, she explained, was "the seed factor," which has for its by-product all things falling into place.

"A lot of people come with marriage problems. Others don't know what their problem is," she said. "Any kind of problem that deals with relationships, that's what I do."

Mrs. Stapleton is asked how she would like to see her Christian witness and testimony affect the individual American.

"I would like them to see in me something they wanted," she responded, "something they thought they could experience." She points to her availability, to her ability to make mistakes, saying, "there's hope for me, there's hope for everybody." Adding that she was a person who used to speak through her weaknesses, but now talks through her strengths.

Labeled
Mrs. Stapleton goes on to explain that she has been labeled, that people expect "someone so spiritual," later having to say "but you're just a human being."

She's an evangelist who has gained a sense of God while losing in her process of spiritual growth her old understanding of what life really is.

"I think real spirituality is spirit given, and down to earth. All I teach in the realm of religion is



Ruth Carter Stapleton, speaking in the TBI fieldhouse, April 28, 1978 (photo from 1978 TBI yearbook)

practical application of spiritual truth."

And if this truth that Mrs. Stapleton knows doesn't make her a more loving person, a happier person, a more giving or sharing person, "then I am not scriptural."

She then asked: "is it possible for an evangelical to take his Christianity—religion—too seriously? Is it possible to be too zealous?"

"Yes," she responds. Mrs. Stapleton then talks about her center called Holovita, a 30-acre spread outside Dallas, Texas, where she helps people with their problems, some of which are the result of being too fanatical.

Speaking of people who may have become too fanatical in their beliefs, she says she wants "to help them see there is a great big world out there. It (faith) is not just something you talk about, it's not just a participation with other people of like minds, but it is an involvement with life." She continues, "and this is one thing I hope to do at the center—to work especially with Christians who have lost a sense of reality and what Christianity means."

Her message has not been accepted by everyone, including members of the Christian community. Because she speaks not only to orthodox Christian groups, but to groups that are anti-Christian or a different religion, she has received much criticism from Christians, which in turn makes its way into the press and into Christian literature.

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Congresswoman Fedorchak to serve Energy & Commerce Committee

North Dakota's new representative in Congress is poised to serve on the Energy and Commerce Committee, the first freshman member to receive that appointment in 14 years.

Julie Fedorchak, who takes office Friday as North Dakota's sole member of the House, has spent the last 12 years as a utility regulator on the Public Service Commission.

"I'm very excited for this next adventure. There's a lot of work to get done," Fedorchak said during a farewell event last month at the Capitol. "And I feel like this job has kind of prepared me in an important way to be as effective as anyone can be out in D.C."

Gov. Kelly Armstrong, right, speaks during a farewell ceremony for Congresswoman-elect Julie Fedorchak, left, at the Capitol on Dec. 19, 2024. (Michael Achterling/North Dakota Monitor)

Gov. Kelly Armstrong, Fedorchak's predecessor in the House, said Fedorchak will immediately be the foremost subject matter expert on energy transmission in the U.S. House. As a member of the PSC, Fedorchak also was president of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners.

"She is going to be immediately the person that they call on," said



Congresswoman-elect Julie Fedorchak speaks during a farewell event in Memorial Hall at the Capitol in Bismarck on Dec. 19, 2024. (Michael Achterling/North Dakota Monitor)

Armstrong, who was elected governor in November after deciding to not seek reelection to Congress.

Randy Christmann, chair of the PSC, came into his seat on the commission at the same time as Fedorchak in 2012 and highlighted her accomplishments before warning U.S. House members that North Dakota is sending a figurative tornado to the legislative body.

"This is a difficult time for me. I'm torn emotionally," Christmann said. "I'm telling you, if in Washington, D.C., if the establishment thinks that President (Donald) Trump and Elon

Musk are going to be the big disrupters, wait until they learn about Julie Fedorchak."

It will be up to Armstrong to appoint a new member to the Public Service Commission to fill Fedorchak's seat. Fedorchak has four years left on her six-year term. The appointee will serve two years, and voters will elect someone in 2026 to serve the remaining two years.

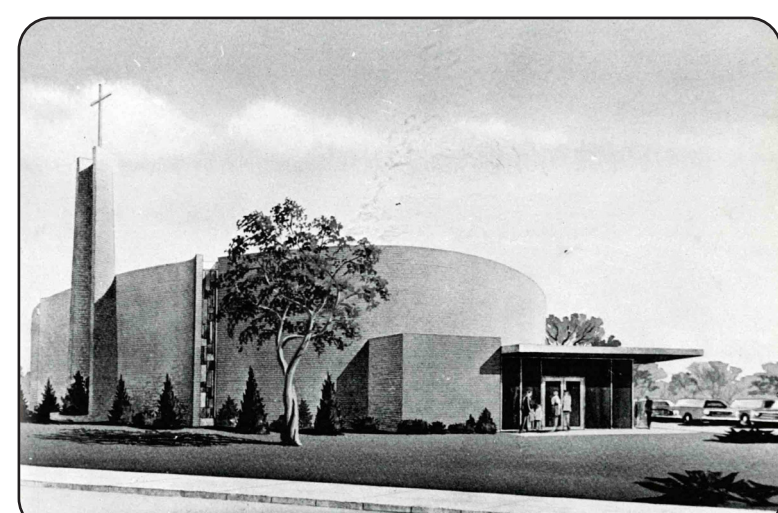
Armstrong said last month he would make an appointment to fill Fedorchak's seat on the commission "sometime after Jan. 3."



President Roy Wead and his wife Rosa Mae, provided leadership for Trinity from 1968 to 1982, including the move from Jamestown to Ellendale in 1972. At right, President Wead presents the school's first "President's Award" to Hattie Block, whose generous gift made possible the new chapel, completed in 1975. It was named the Walter and Hattie Block Memorial chapel (architect's drawing at right).

Hattie's friendship with Ruth Carter Stapleton led to the Wead's getting acquainted with the famous evangelist, and in turn to Ruth's invitation to speak at the 1978 annual TBI/Community banquet.

(photos from 1974 and 1982 TBI Yearbooks)



Ellendale Landfill Hours
The hours (weather permitting) for the inert landfill from December 1 to March 31 are:
Saturdays, 10 am to 4 pm

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