

THE CROW'S NEST

## Local governments weigh impact of compliance with online ADA rules

BY AMY WOBBEA

I first heard about the new federal accessibility standards for government agency websites a few weeks ago from a local official, then this week brought both more clarity and more questions.



As reported by Ceilidh Kern for the North Dakota Monitor, state government agencies and all subdivisions with a population of 50,000 or more face an April 24 deadline to make sure their websites are in compliance with federal accessibility guidelines, a process that is both time-consuming and expensive. Communities with smaller populations, such as New Rockford, Carrington and Eddy and Foster counties, however, have until April 2027 to comply.

Kern writes, "In April 2024, the U.S. Department of Justice announced a new rule requiring state and local governments' websites and apps to comply with accessibility standards under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

"Updates could include making content compatible with a screen reader for people with a visual impairment or adding subtitles to videos for people who are hard of hearing.

"... If governments don't meet these deadlines, they could be taken to court.

"That could reduce transparency, according to Matt Gardner, executive director of the North Dakota League of Cities.

"To comply with a federal law, the best way to do it is probably to delete portions of your website and remove documents," Gardner said during a Jan. 21 legislative hearing.

"At a time when we want to be more transparent, I could see political subdivisions across the state being less transparent," he added.

The discussion came during the three-day special legislative session last month that was mostly focused on federal rural health dollars. However, one bill ultimately approved by the legislature included a request for \$1.5 million from North Dakota Information Technology to help state agencies update their websites and apps, according to Kern's report.

Although lawmakers approved the state agency's funding request and the League of Cities' subsequent request to allow local governments to buy into a state contract for a tool to scan government websites for compatibility, the bill didn't include money requested by Gardner to help cities and counties cover the cost.

With no funds to help local governments obtain compliance, Gardner said in an interview after the session that cities may have to look for free resources to meet federal requirements.

"When you think of a very small community, I mean, their entire property tax collection may be \$14,000. They have very limited resources to buy into a state contract," Gardner told the Monitor.

"That could impact government transparency, particularly for complex, externally produced content, such as financial audit reports or engineering firms' project designs, which officials could opt to remove rather than update, Gardner said.

"At the hearing, Sen. Brad Bekkedahl, a Republican from Williston and the chairman of the Joint Appropriations Committee, told Gardner that if cities are concerned about liability, he would encourage them to pull down content.

"If it's that big of a liability issue, that's what I'd recommend my city to do," said Bekkedahl, who is also a Williston city commissioner. "Is it detrimental to citizens? Absolutely. But this is a federal mandate. We didn't bring this on ourselves."

"Mock told the committee that for state agencies, online content is being triaged, with the most critical content — such as applications or information about services — being updated first. As the deadline approaches, less critical information could be temporarily removed and republished later. ... Older content, meanwhile, will be archived on state agencies' websites, where it will still be accessible to the public."

As our state and local government officials evaluate the new rules and establish processes to maintain compliance, it's possible that they may choose not to publish some otherwise public information online, thus potentially reducing accessibility. This information will still be available, it will just require a citizen to physically request it from a government office rather than find it online.

While the intent is not to reduce transparency, like all "unfunded mandates" from the federal government, local officials have to weigh the cost of compliance with the implications to their already-stretched budgets.

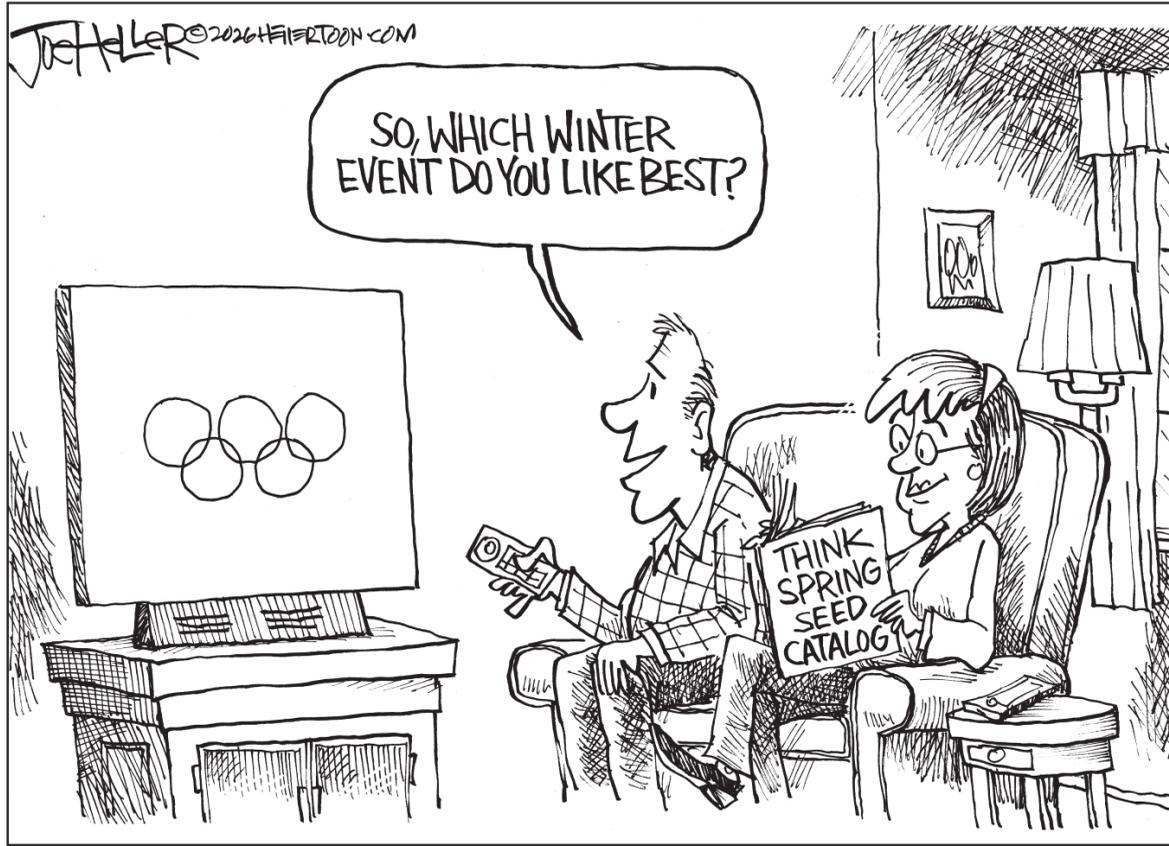
As the publisher of your local newspaper, I am following the process and will have more questions to ask of our local officials as they seek to comply with these new rules over the next year.

Nevertheless, these rules underscore the importance of keeping public notices and minutes of local government meetings in newspapers.

No matter what the local governments decide, readers should know that any and all public notices and content we produce will continue to be accessible both in print and online.

I have also asked our web developer to look into screen reader compatibility for our websites, to see how we can make our website more accessible to individuals with disabilities.

Read the North Dakota Monitor's entire article about the ADA accessibility guidelines and their impact on N.D. government entities, available online at fosterconews.com.



UPSIDE DOWN UNDER

## TV violence has too much influence on too many people

BY MARVIN BAKER

Since television became commercially available in the United States in the late 1940s, it has influenced the American public like nothing else in the history of this nation.

Television has grown a great deal and mass communication professors teach that 100% of homes in the United States have at least one TV. That kind of statistic doesn't seem real, but when you think about the few people who don't have TV, it's less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the population so it's an insignificant number.

That kind of influence is great for the TV industry and the retailers who sell them.

And in a free and democratic society, the producers of TV programs basically have the freedom and flexibility to create what they want, as long as they get the advertising support to back up so-called controversial programming.

TV production continues to evolve and it has become so risqué and so violent that some viewers write letters of protest to

networks and local TV stations.

If you have cable, and now with some new TVs, you have parental controls over terrestrial TV. The thing is, there shouldn't have to be restrictions on network television. Cable is another thing. You are paying for a specific service and if you want R-rated movies, that's up to you. But over-the-air, the only choice people have a lot of times is to shut the TV off or change to another channel that has similar programming.



Choices are getting better, but on any given night, you can turn on network TV and you can see police getting gunned down in the streets. You can see teenage girls forced into prostitution and drug use; you can see gang activity being glorified.

You can see a growing list of outrageous shows that can easily influence a lot of adults, not to mention teens and pre-teens. Oh, the magic of television and its power to influence.

A lot of shows are com-

ing up with titles that include the word murder or homicide or arson in them. Some of the theme songs as well, have questionable lyrics that can influence in the wrong way.

And it appears the problem is feeding on itself. The more violence in TV and music, the larger the scale of violence on city streets.

For the most part, those of us who live here in North Dakota have not seen that behavior on a large scale, but it's beginning to emerge. As Fargo and Bismarck continue to grow, so do the crime statistics.

OK, I'll say it. Government control isn't the answer. Advertising continues to get sold to support said programs, so the only way the spectre of violence is going to be curbed is when producers voluntarily come up with better, more enriching story lines.

Nor do I think TV producers should be censored. It's just the simple fact: there's too much of it and the influence has become too great to ignore.

Everybody likes comedy, but what is happening to it? There's been a steady downward trend of sitcoms

on nightly television. Hilari-

ous is giving way to violence when in effect, it should be the exact opposite.

But, to be fair, sports has risen a great deal too. With the advent of digital TV and now some screens that exceed 100 inches, you could be right in there with the action. That said, football has been available on Sunday, Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Basketball is now on network TV on Monday and Tuesday.

Some of us might think that's a sports overload, and it kind of is, but if it replaces violence on TV, it's for the better.

Most of us can discern the difference when it comes to what is too violent to be watching. And we often seek out those programs that are the way TV was originally intended.

But for those who don't, TV can be, and often is, a bad influence because of the violent nature of programming. Let's hope the change continues to shift in the right direction.

Marvin Baker is a news writer for the Kenmare News and formerly Foster County Independent.

## - Weekly Recipe -

### Create your own portable energy booster right at home

Protein bars are a convenient energy booster that's easy to carry. That portability makes protein bars a go-to for outdoor enthusiasts who enjoy activities like hiking that burn lots of calories. Though it's easy to pick up a protein bar at the store, it's also possible to make your own at home. Anyone interested in doing so can try their hands at this recipe for "Homemade Protein Bars with Peanut Butter and Hemp Protein" courtesy of Lines+Angles.

#### Homemade Protein Bars with Peanut Butter and Hemp Protein

Makes 8 bars

##### Ingredients

- 13 ounces peanut butter, no added sugar, divided
- 2 1/2 ounces pure maple syrup
- 3 ounces almond flour
- 3 ounces coconut oil
- 6 ounces chopped dark chocolate, at least 70% cocoa, divided
- 3 ounces hemp seeds
- 1 pinch salt

##### Directions

1. Grease and line the base and sides of an 8-inch baking

- dish with parchment paper.
2. In a large mixing bowl, thoroughly stir together 1 cup of peanut butter with the maple syrup and almond flour until well combined. Transfer to the baking dish, evenly pressing it across the base. Cover and chill until needed.
3. Meanwhile, combine the remaining 1/2 cup peanut butter, coconut oil, half the chocolate, hemp seeds and salt in a heatproof bowl. Set the bowl over a half-filled saucepan of simmering water,

- stirring until smooth.
4. Remove from the heat and pour the mixture over the chilled base. (Keep the water simmering.)
5. Place the remaining chocolate in a clean bowl. Set it over the simmering water, stirring until melted.
6. Drizzle the melted chocolate over the topping in the tin. Cover and chill until set, about 4 hours.
7. When ready to serve, cut into slices and turn out.

Editor's Note: For the months of January and February, we will be featuring recipes weekly on this page. The weekly crossword can be found on the game page.

Erik Gjovik.....News, Sports, Photography, Design  
Leasa A. Lura.....News, Advertising Layout, Design  
Kim Watson.....Copy Editor  
Kayla Schumacker.....Accounting

Phone (701) 652-3181 : : FAX (701) 652-3286  
Email Address: [www.fosterconews@daktel.com](mailto:www.fosterconews@daktel.com)  
[www.fosterconews.com](http://www.fosterconews.com)

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: \$78.00 per year in North Dakota; \$85.00 per year elsewhere in the U.S. Online only, \$45 per year. No subscription for less than one year accepted. Postal regulations require subscriptions to be paid in advance.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY: Letters to the editor must be signed to be printed. Editor reserves the right to print letters to the editor at her discretion.

ATTENTION, POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Circulation Department, Foster County Independent, P.O. Box 138, Carrington, ND 58421-0138.

**DEADLINE:**  
News Copy & Photos, Classified Ads  
& Legals, and Advertising:  
Tuesday at 1 p.m.

The Foster County  
**Independent**

P.O. Box 138 Carrington, ND 58421

Amy Wobbema.....Publisher

Periodicals postage paid at the post office in Carrington, North Dakota, and published every Monday from its office at 1191 W Main St., Carrington, ND 58421-0138.

ISSN#0199-4700