



SARAH WETZEL/FOR THE PLAIN TALK

Holiday Concert A Joint Success

BY SARAH WETZEL
For the Plain Talk

The University of South Dakota College of Fine Arts presented a holiday concert Sunday featuring both on and off campus musical groups.

Performers included the USD Chamber Singers, Concert Choir, Men's and Women's Chorus, Jazz Ensemble, Symphony Orchestra and National Association for Music Education bell ringers. Joining the USD groups was the Vermillion Children's Choir.

The Children's Choir kicked off the concert with four pieces, all memorized and well in-tune including a song in Haida and another in Hebrew.

The concert ran seamlessly from there with the wide variety of USD musical groups.

You would think that it would take awhile with so many groups to move on and off stage.

This challenge was fixed with several performances by the NaFME Ringers in between groups to give time for the next performers to set up behind the curtain.

It seemed like every musical taste was represented from the more serious choral music by Concert Choir to the toe-tapping carols of the Jazz Ensemble.

Some personal favorite pieces were 'Introit' from Requiem by the Concert Choir. Part of the choir was up the balcony, creating a hauntingly beautiful echo effect for part of the piece.

I also enjoyed the Jazz Ensemble's Jingle Bells rendition with solos by Lexy Tuttle on tenor sax and Thad Alberty on trumpet.

Chamber Singers also performed an arrangement of Jingle Bells which was very fun and cheerful. The singers obviously were having a good time.

The orchestra chose not to perform any Christmas music which was a slight disappointment but on the whole added variety to the concert

and kept things interesting, ending with a rousing performance of Farandole from L'Arlesienne Suite No. 2 by Georges Bizet.

As an audience member I appreciated the chance to attend a choral showcase, orchestra concert and jazz performance all in one sitting.

The closer you paid attention the more you appreciated the true talent of all the performers as well.

This was not just because each group performed extremely well, but also how many students did so well in multiple groups.

One student sang in one group, played in the bell choir and accompanied another group on the piano. I also recognized her from the recent marching band concert.

Another student conducted and sang in one group, sang in another and played flute in yet another.

Community members could also be seen in both the Men's and Women's Chorus and the Symphony Orchestra which welcome community participation.

As the choirs warmed up before the concert, Dr. David Holdhusen encouraged the singers to enjoy sharing the music despite the rushing from one thing to another than many experience during the holiday season.

Holdhusen shared how when it snowed recently he paused for a minute and reflected on just how beautiful it made USD campus.

According to him, a concert like this provides that moment of reflection for music lovers in the hectic rush of the holidays to escape and appreciate the season.

It seemed as if all the groups accomplished this goal.

All in all, it was a pleasant way to spend a Sunday afternoon and receive an infusion of holiday spirit compliments of talented musicians from USD and the Vermillion community.

City Council Hears Plans For MRES Ammendment

BY SHAUNA MARLETTE
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Joni Livingston of Missouri River Energy Services (MRES) spoke to the City Council on Monday during the noon meeting presenting the changes to the city's S-1 Agreement with the organization.

"Recently there have been changes to the way that Missouri River Energy provides power to your community," Livingston said. "Because of those changes we have to amend our power sale agreement, commonly called the S-1 agreement. We need to change the language because it no longer fits the way we are providing power to you."

Background Of The S-1 Agreement

"We are a joint action agency," explained Livingston. "We were formed by our members and we are owned by our members. Vermillion is one of the members of the MRES along with 59 other municipal utilities in Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota and South Dakota. Back in the 1960s we were successful in getting our members an allocation of hydropower allocations."

Livingston went on to explain that changes in power allocation forced the first changes to the group.

"When Western Area Power Association (WAPA) could no longer provide all the power that our members needed, we were tasked with creating new sources of power that our members needed," she said. "That is when Western Minnesota Municipal Power Agency (WMMPA) was formed, because MRES was formed under the laws of Iowa we could not finance any generations projects if there were any participants from outside of the state of Iowa. So, WMMPA was formed to become the financing agent for any projects that are done by MRES. WMMPA has one customer that is MRES. They provide the financing for both generation projects and transmission projects. The S-1 agreement provides the bond security for the bonds that WMMPA issues."

"When we needed to build those first power plants that is when the first S-1 agreements were signed."

Livingston stressed that the S-1 agreements are there to protect the members.

"Our interests are very much aligned, we are both not for profit," she said. "It is our core purpose to help our members meet their missions. The S-1 agreements are System Supply Long-Term contracts, which means they are not project based and not unit contingent. Everyone shares in all the resources that are owned and operated by MRES and everyone pays the same rates. The S-1 contracts provide for all of the power over and above your WAPA allotment provided by MRES."

Changes In The Future

"Under the current contract that includes transmission to what has been commonly referred to the outlet of the Integrated System (IS). That is the transmission system we currently use to transmit all of the power you receive," Livingston said. "However, in the future that is going to change."

"The S-1 agreement was executed in 1976 and there have been four amendments to the agreement. In 1993 with amendment 2, we asked for a 14 year extension and in 2007 we asked for a 16 year extension. With amendment 5 we are asking for an 11 year extension."

"On Oct. 1, WAPA decided to join a regional transmission organization called the Southwest Power Pool (SPP). A regional transmission organization (RTO) runs energy markets and the transmission system."

Livingston said both organizations had no choice but to join the SPP.

"When WAPA has excess power to sell, they need someone to sell that power to, likewise if the power output is low, they need to be able to purchase the power to meet their contracts," she said. "There were getting to be fewer and fewer contract parties for WAPA to work

with. They were forced to go into the market and that then forced MRES to go into the market."

She said that when WAPA went into SPP that meant that they also transferred the IS transmission facilities into the SPP network of transmission facilities. That means that MRES can no longer use that integrated system to deliver power to Vermillion.

"This means that MRES no longer has control of our generational facilities or our transmission facilities," Livingston said. "The RTOs have the functional control of those facilities. We own them, we bid them into the market, but the SPP are the ones that decide if our generational resources operate or not."

She explained that any output will be sold to the market.

"We will get paid the clearing price for that day and that hour, whatever that may be," Livingston said. "In a completely separate transaction, we will buy the power that each of our members need, at a point near your community. We will buy that power from the market at the price for the day. We will use the RTO transmission network to deliver to you, but it will all be controlled by the market. We will be using financial transactions to deliver the power you need to you. That is the main thing that will be changing with your contract."

Livingston admitted that this change does give MRES more uncertainty on a day-by-day basis, however she stressed that all of the generation facilities provide a hedge to the market.

"If the costs to provide power are high, the costs we recoup for selling power are almost guaranteed to be high, as well. We really should have a good balance," she said.

"If we bid our resources into the market and they are not chosen to run, that is because the market costs are very low and we can actually buy from the market cheaper than we could generate it ourselves. One of the biggest benefits we

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Reaction

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(D-Gregory) said she was pleased to see the possibility of Medicaid expansion and more money for health care providers.

"This will really benefit the rural providers. We've got several nursing homes that go all the way from Winner down to Yankton and past, where you're looking at small-town nursing homes in that stretch," she said. "Each and every one of them serves primarily Medicaid patients."

District 21 Sen. Billie Sutton (D-Burke) expressed support for Medicaid expansion.

"(Health and Human Services) has put out a white paper asking for public

input and has very strongly worded that they were truly considering this (Medicaid expansion arrangement) for South Dakota and other states," he said. "It's viewed as a treaty right for Native Americans for the federal government to pay for their health care."

The move would also provide better services for Native Americans such as telehealth, dialysis and mental health counseling, he said.

As for education, Sutton served on the Blue Ribbon Task Force, and he finds the proposed 0.3 percent increase for K-12 funding to be "problematic."

He also sees the need for raising teacher pay.

"From the standpoint as Democrats, I believe we would like to see more like a \$10,000 increase in average teacher pay, to get it up to

\$50,000. That would get us ahead of North Dakota, Nebraska, Montana and right in the middle of the surrounding states," he said.

"We need to get to regional comparisons, to see how we rank regionally. People are looking at what the Midwest offers. It doesn't matter to me what teachers make nationally, but how they're ranked regionally."

District 19 Rep. Kyle Schoenfish (R-Scotland) has voted for Medicaid expansion in the past. He sees it benefiting the state's smaller hospitals as well as insured and private pay patients who bear the costs associated with indigent health care.

"The rural hospitals in our area are very supportive of the Medicaid expansion," he said.

When it comes to education, Schoenfish also sees

rural schools in his legislative district watching the K-12 funding formula. "Our school districts are very dependent on the small school factor," he said.

District 16 Sen. Bill Shorma (R-Dakota Dunes) has heard concerns from educators in his district about teacher pay and education funding.

"I have been meeting with (school) superintendents," he said. "One of those things they're concerned about is that the teacher shortage is at the tipping point where some action needs to be taken. The Blue Ribbon Task Force is stacking up how we compare to surrounding states."

District 16 Rep. Dave Anderson (R-Hudson) said he has heard concerns about only acting on parts of the Blue Ribbon Task Force report.

"The main thing I'm hearing from the schools is that this isn't a smorgasbord where we pick a couple of items you like. You have to look at this list of items as a single pack with all of the items necessary to meet the goals they have set out," he said.

"As far as the 0.3 percent (state aid increase), the statutory amount (using the inflation factor) would be 2.5 percent. The anticipation is that something will come from the Blue Ribbon Task Force that would change the funding mechanism for schools."

Anderson also holds questions about health care, particularly the negotiations involving the Indian Health Service (IHS) for additional federal funds in turn to help fund Medicaid expansion in South Dakota. "I still don't see it as

changing anything structurally (at IHS). You're just moving money around in a different fashion," he said. "In terms of structurally changing health care for Native Americans, a really significant part of the mechanism isn't working very well."

"If you can't come up with constructively changing the delivery of health care, throwing more dollars at it isn't going to make things better."

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