

Schiro Highlights Pollution Prevention Program at Vermillion Rotary



By Sarah Wetzel For the Plain Talk, January 30, 2026

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Robin Schiro appeared before the Vermillion Rotary Club Jan. 14 to ask for help with a program that is lacking the same support it gets in other states.

The program in question deals with the Pollution Prevention Act of 1990 which required the Environmental Protection Agency to establish a source reduction program which collects and disseminates information, provides financial assistance to states and implements other Pollution Prevention (P2) activities.

According to a video Schiro shared, it involves companies hosting interns who provide insight on what is happening within their facility and give recommendations on how to improve. Following said recommendations over time saves money, increases efficiency and replaces hazardous chemicals among other benefits.

“This is what they consider pollution prevention,” Schiro said. “It’s not disposal; it’s not treatment; it’s not recycling; it’s not reuse. It’s actually source reduction.”

According to Schiro, \$9.3 million in total was given out in grant funding from 2024 to 2025 with \$350,000 being the ceiling for one of the grants.

“The projects that must fit within this program are six projects,” she said. “Food and beverage maintenance, aerospace product and parts



Robin Schiro addresses the Jan. 14 meeting of the Vermillion Rotary Club and shares information about a government program that can help various segments of society and industry experience cost savings by reducing pollution.

Courtesy of Vermillion Rotary Club

manufacturing and maintenance, metal manufacturing and fabrication, and then of course the Indian country and Alaskan native villages.”

According to Schiro’s data, between 2011 and 2022, the \$54 million in grants saved businesses \$2.3 billion by identifying P2 approaches. One billion pounds of hazardous waste was reduced, 52 billion gallons of water was saved, 20.8 million metric tons of greenhouse gases were eliminated and 31.9 billion kilowatt hours of energy was saved.

Schiro initiated the program in 2017 when she worked at Tyson and is looking to get it into the state of South Dakota.

For the Tyson company, she said the interns suggested many projects including installing occupancy sensors to save electricity, panel activators on faucets to save water and specialized employee training to make sure things were run more efficiently.

“Texas, Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa are all part of this program,” Schiro said. “South Dakota is not...I’m hoping USD is our first university in South Dakota that gets on board with this because these interns are provided to industry to do this pollution prevention at a cost savings to them as well as to the schools because they have students for the summer in a program as well as to the community.”

The program benefits the interns as well, she said, adding that when the program was done in 2017, 67% of the interns were offered full-time positions of which 83% accepted.

The whole program is a no-brainer when it comes to the benefits, Schiro said.

“The funding from EPA helps pay for these students, the school gets research projects because one of them used it as his PhD dissertation,” she said. “It would be a win-win to me if I was an employer to hire one of these pollution prevention interns...I found that this program was very beneficial. I’m disappointed that over my lifetime it hasn’t happened in South

Dakota yet but I'm hoping that Megan and other professors as well as maybe all of you will help initiate this.”

Schiro asked the audience to keep an eye out for anyone in industry who might be interested in hiring an intern.

“These kids, nobody suspects that they’re there watching people because they’re there at night and they’re young kids,” she said. “They don’t think they’re management so they can see things that other employees and management cannot see...I hope that some of you get energized and excited to help me and Megan get this going.”