

Ava Wieber - NDRWSA - Denne Scholarship Application

The water industry is one of the most essential systems in society, yet it is often only noticed when something goes wrong. Clean, reliable water supports public health, economic growth, environmental stewardship, and quality of life. From rural communities in North Dakota to large cities across the country, safe drinking water and effective wastewater treatment are foundational services that protect people every day. For my family, this is personal. My grandpa Neil has spent his career in the water industry, and some of my favorite family conversations have been about something most people take for granted: the water in Reynolds, North Dakota. Whenever we visited or talked about home, my family would proudly say Reynolds had the best water anywhere, and it was always said with the kind of confidence that comes from knowing the people behind the system care about doing it right.

First, the water industry is critical for public health. Access to treated drinking water prevents waterborne illnesses and reduces exposure to harmful contaminants. Water and wastewater professionals monitor, test, disinfect, and maintain systems so families can trust the water that comes from their taps. When a water system fails, the consequences can be immediate and serious, ranging from boil orders to outbreaks of disease. The work done by water districts, operators, engineers, and field staff is a constant, behind-the-scenes commitment to keeping communities healthy.

Second, the water industry is central to economic stability and growth. Nearly every business depends on water, including agriculture, manufacturing, energy production, and healthcare. Farms need dependable water for livestock and crop production, and food processing facilities rely on water for sanitation and operations. Hospitals and clinics must have safe water for cleaning, sterilization, and patient care. Without reliable water infrastructure, communities would struggle to attract employers, expand housing, or support new development. Investing in water systems is an investment in a community's future.

The water industry also plays a vital role in environmental protection. Wastewater treatment prevents pollution from entering rivers and lakes, protecting fish and wildlife and preserving recreation areas. In states like North Dakota, where many people enjoy fishing, boating, and time outdoors, keeping waterways clean is especially important. Modern water management also includes conservation, leak detection, and responsible resource planning, which help protect water supplies for future generations.

Finally, the water industry reflects service, responsibility, and community leadership. Many rural water districts serve large geographic areas and operate with limited resources, which makes planning, maintenance, and emergency response even more challenging.

Dedicated professionals ensure that even small or remote communities have access to safe water. Their work requires long-term thinking, technical skill, and a strong commitment to the public good.

In short, the water industry is essential because it safeguards health, supports economic activity, protects the environment, and strengthens communities. It is a dependable system that allows daily life to function. When I think about my family's pride in the water in Reynolds and the work Neil has devoted his life to, it reminds me that safe water is not an accident; it is the result of expertise, planning, and people who take their responsibility seriously. Recognizing and supporting the water industry means investing in the well-being and resilience of every community it serves.