

Bill Passed For Underage Drinkers

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Underage drinkers who seek medical help for alcohol poisoning could avoid alcohol charges under a bill passed by Nebraska lawmakers.

The measure won final approval Thursday in the Legislature, 44-0.

The proposal by Sen. Adam Morfeld of Lincoln would give limited legal immunity to underage drinkers who are intoxicated, call for medical assistance and cooperate with authorities. Immunity would only apply to alcohol charges.

Morfeld has said the bill is designed to encourage underage drinkers to seek medical attention when their lives are at risk without having to fear a criminal conviction. The proposal is backed by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, student leaders and Lincoln police.

Neb. Budgets \$200M For Tax Relief

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska property owners could see their tax bills lowered by a collective \$200 million annually under a tentative state budget.

The funding approved this week by the Appropriations Committee would increase the state's property tax credit fund by \$60 million annually over the next two years. The fund is already set to distribute \$140 million over that period, reducing what property owners pay on their local tax bills.

The amount advanced by the committee matches what Gov. Pete Ricketts had requested for the two-year state budget.

Sen. Heath Mello of Omaha, the committee chairman, says the budget still includes room for prison reform legislation and other priorities, but nothing has been finalized.

Regents Choose Schaefer For President

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Board of Regents has chosen Randy Schaefer to succeed retiring Regent Dean Krogman as president of the board, which oversees South Dakota's six public universities.

The board voted Thursday at its meeting at the University of South Dakota to install Schaefer as president. He has served on the board since 2009.

Schaefer lives in Madison and owns an insurance agency there. He is a graduate of Dakota State University.

Krogman is stepping down after 12 years on the board, where he served as president for the last two years. Schaefer says he had "a strong and steady hand" working to support the state's public universities.

The board has also chosen Bob Sutton as vice president and Terry Baloun as secretary.

SD Judge Denies Delay Of Execution

PIERRE (AP) — Attorney General Marty Jackley says a state judge has denied a motion by Rodney Berget to delay his May execution.

Jackley says Circuit Court Judge Brad Zell found that Berget's motion was outside of his court's jurisdiction. Berget had filed the motion on Jan. 30.

Berget was sentenced to die for his role in killing State Penitentiary guard Ronald Johnson during an April 2011 escape attempt.

Another inmate charged in Johnson's death, Eric Robert, was executed in 2012. A third inmate, Michael Nordman, was sentenced to life in prison for providing materials used in the slaying of Johnson, which happened on his 63rd birthday.

Jackley says Berget may still seek the right to file additional habeas proceedings in order to stay his sentencing date.

Boss Recorded Employees Changing

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A 30-year-old man has been sent to jail for recording images of his female employees changing clothes in a locker room at a Lincoln restaurant.

Online court records say Dustin Lindgren, of Milford, on Wednesday was sentenced to 180 days in jail and five years of probation. Lindgren had pleaded no contest and been convicted of two counts of unlawful intrusion. A third count was dropped in a deal with prosecutors.

Authorities say Lindgren was manager of the Tilted Kilt Pub & Eatery when he used a cellphone hidden in a jacket pocket to record at least 12 women in January and February 2014. One of the women noticed the phone and notified police.

Neb. Man Charged With Sexual Assault

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A Lincoln man has been charged with sexual assault after a woman staying at his home claimed he raped her.

The Lincoln Journal Star reports 43-year-old Ricky Lee Jackson was charged Wednesday with first-degree sexual assault. He remained in custody Thursday.

Police say Jackson allowed a woman he knows to stay at his apartment in November after she had gone out drinking with her friends. The woman told police she fell asleep several times and continuously woke up to Jackson performing sexual acts on her.

Officer Michelle Jochum says the woman reported the alleged sexual assault the next morning. Police say they interviewed Jackson about the incident Tuesday after months of investigation. He told officers he didn't hear the woman tell him to stop.

Firefighters Move Into New Station

BENNINGTON, Neb. (AP) — Firefighters of Bennington Rural Fire District No. 7 have finally moved into their new fire station after it was in the works for 10 years.

The Omaha World-Herald reports that volunteer firefighters moved into their new \$6 million, 29,000-square-foot station house last month. According to Fire Chief Bob Rayman, the new space includes 10 firetruck bays, a water-rescue boat and other equipment.

Construction of the building began in August 2012, and was paid for by rural fire district bond issues in 2012, 2013 and 2014 and a donation from two Washington County residents.

Firefighters needed the larger space because of an increase in rescue and fire calls in the 42-square-mile fire district. Rural District No. 7 is made up of 46 volunteers, 15 of whom are full-time firefighters in other cities.

Behind the wheel: 3 of 4 teens drive

NEW YORK (AP) — A new government study finds about 3 out of 4 older teens are driving, but rates vary widely by state and city.

Hawaii had the lowest percentage of teen drivers, at 53 percent. North Dakota and South Dakota had the largest proportions, at about 90 percent.

The teen driving rate in the U.S. was as high as 85 percent a decade ago but has been declining, earlier research found.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study released Thursday found roughly 75 percent of teens 16 and older are drivers. Researchers also — for the first time — reported driving rate differences from place to place.

The report was based on a 2013 survey of tens of thousands of teens in 42 states and 21 cities. States not included: California, Colorado, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Washington.

- The study also found:
 - Among 21 large school districts, the highest proportion of drivers — 76 percent — was in Charlotte, North Carolina. Close behind was — at 75 percent — was Jacksonville, Florida.
 - San Francisco, New York City and Boston were at the other end of the spectrum, with only about 30 percent of kids 16 and older saying they drove in the previous month. In those cities, there's more public transportation and owning and parking a car is more of a hassle.
 - About 83 percent of white teens said they drove in the previous month, compared to a little under 70 percent of blacks and Hispanics.

Deadly Bird Flu Shows Up In South Dakota, 5th Minnesota Farm

BY CARSON WALKER AND STEVE KARNOWSKI

Associated Press

SIoux FALLS — A bird flu strain that's deadly to poultry has spread to a second turkey farm in one of the top turkey-producing counties of Minnesota, state and federal officials said Thursday.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture confirmed the H5N2 strain in a flock of 71,000 turkeys in Stearns County, the Minnesota Board of Animal Health said. That brings the number of Minnesota turkey farms where the strain has been detected to five, officials said.

The strain also has shown up in a commercial turkey flock in South Dakota. So far, the total number of outbreaks in the Midwest has reached 10 and led to the deaths of 314,000 birds since early March.

Earlier, the USDA confirmed the H5N2 strain in a flock of 53,000 turkeys in Beadle County of eastern South Dakota, and a fourth Minnesota case in the southwest part of the state, in Nobles County, involving a commercial turkey farm with about 21,000 birds.

Following the same protocols used at other infected farms, the surviving birds at the operations have been quarantined and will be killed to prevent the disease's spread. Any nearby poultry farms will be checked.

While officials have stressed there's little danger to public health and no food safety concern, they've monitored

workers at the affected farms as a precaution. No human H5N2 infections have been reported in the U.S., although the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said similar viruses have been detected in people in other countries.

The infected South Dakota flock is on Riverside Farms near Huron, one of several Hutterite colonies that own and supply turkeys to Dakota Turkey Growers LLC.

"It's extremely frightening, to be honest with you," Dakota Turkey Growers president and CEO Ken Rutledge said. "We were hopeful we'd be able to get through this without having a break in the state."

The birds killed by the virus or euthanized represent just a sliver of the overall U.S. turkey production — 235 million birds in 2014, according to USDA statistics.

Experts say U.S. consumers likely will benefit from lower turkey prices eventually because poultry that would have been exported will have to be sold instead on the domestic market. More than 40 countries have imposed import restrictions since late last year. Some bans are limited to the affected states or counties, while China cut off all poultry shipments from the U.S.

Minnesota — the nation's top turkey-producing state — was the first state to see the H5N2 strain in the Mississippi Flyway, a major wild bird migration route. The state's first case was confirmed March 4, followed by flocks

in Arkansas and Missouri. Kansas was the first to see H5N2 in the Central Flyway when the virus was confirmed in a backyard chicken and duck flock on March 13, now followed by South Dakota.

The same virus and other highly pathogenic H5 bird flu strains also have turned up in commercial and backyard flocks and wild birds in the Pacific Flyway since late last year.

Experts say turkeys appear to be particularly susceptible to this virus, but chickens and other species are not immune. Montana's first recorded case this week was confirmed in a captive falcon.

Most commercially grown turkeys and chickens in the U.S. spend their entire lives indoors to keep them away from waterfowl and other wild birds that could introduce diseases. Migratory ducks and geese don't normally become sick from bird flu, but can spread viruses via droppings, which farm workers and rodents can then track into barns.

Biosecurity has been stepped up at farms across the Midwest in recent weeks in response. The outbreaks have been a particular concern in Minnesota — which has had the most cases in the region and lost 170,000 turkeys. The affected turkey farms in Missouri lost 51,000 birds, the while one in Arkansas lost 40,020. Kansas officials have refused to release their losses.

SD Delegation Says Bat Listing Is Misguided

RAPID CITY (AP) — Listing the northern long-eared bat as threatened is a misguided approach to addressing the mammal's decline, members of South Dakota's congressional delegation believe.

The state won't immediately be affected by the new protective measures, but Sens. John Thune and Mike Rounds and Rep. Kristi Noem, all Republicans, worry about potential harm to the Black Hills timber industry.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on Wednesday announced its decision to list the bat as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The move comes in response to the spread of a deadly fungal disease called white-nose syndrome that has killed millions of the bats. The agency says the bats play a key role in insect control and are "a critical component of our nation's ecology and economy."

Thune said the agency's restrictions on forest management do "not focus on the real problem, which is that northern long-eared bat deaths are due to white-nose syndrome, not habitat loss." Rounds called it "another example of federal overreach by this administration."

Protective measures will improve the bats' breeding oppor-

tunities by restricting some logging and tree removal from forest areas where the bats spend the warmer months, Fish and Wildlife said.

White-nose syndrome has been confirmed or suspected in 28 of the 37 states where the bats live. It has not yet been found in South Dakota, and the state won't immediately be affected by the new protective measures.

"While I am relieved to see South Dakota land outside the buffer zone for now, I remain concerned that the Fish and Wildlife Service continues to elevate an unproven environmental agenda rather (than) keeping the focus on a disease that truly jeopardizes the long-eared bat's population in certain areas of the county," Noem said.

If the disease ever is detected in South Dakota, it could hurt the Black Hills timber industry, which employs about 1,500 people and generates an estimated \$119 million in revenue annually, the delegation said.

The Black Hills Forest Resource Association, a trade group whose members include logging companies, praised the Fish and Wildlife Service's decision to exempt South Dakota's habitat but also said in a statement that there is concern about possible future restrictions.

Nebraska Black-Tailed Prairie Dog Bill Likely Dead This Year

BY GRANT SCHULTE

Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — An attempt to repeal Nebraska's black-tailed prairie dog management law was derailed Thursday by senators who argued that the animals ruin grazing land.

The repeal bill hit a last-minute roadblock before a final vote in the Legislature. A procedural vote initiated by a leading opponent kept the bill from passing before a Thursday morning deadline, and Speaker Galen Hadley said he won't allow it back onto this year's agenda.

The 2012 law gives counties the option to control the spread of black-tailed prairie dogs when a landowner's neighbors complain about the animals on their property. Supporters of the law argued Thursday that the animals destroy valuable grassland and reduce property values.

Only Sheridan County in northwest Nebraska has made use of the law, requiring written notification that gives landowners 60 days to manage the prairie dog colonies. Landowners who fail to comply could face a fine of up to \$1,500. If they

haven't shown progress after 60 days, the county can send an agent to take "appropriate management measures" at the owner's expense.

County officials have said they were previously unable to help several ranch owners whose neighbors allowed prairie dogs to flourish and migrate onto other properties.

"We are dealing with people who are being obstinate and not trying to address the problem," said Sen. Al Davis, a Hyannis rancher who led the opposition.

Black-tailed prairie dogs are considered a "keystone" species that play a crucial role in the region's ecological balance. They're widespread in parts of northwest Nebraska, where they dig holes in ranchland. Ranchers say cattle can step in the holes and break legs.

Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha, who sponsored the bill, said the law is unconstitutional because it doesn't include due-process safeguards. Chambers said the law allows county officials to trespass on private land without a warrant and offers landowners no legal recourse if their property is damaged.

Chairman Of Winnebago Tribal Council Resigns

WINNEBAGO, Neb. (AP) — The embattled chairman of the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska has resigned.

The Lincoln Journal Star reports that John Blackhawk, who served as chairman for 20 years, resigned Tuesday. His resignation comes in the wake of an audit that alleges he and other tribal council members gave themselves hundreds of thousands of dollars in bonuses and tribal casino gifts.

A tribal investigative committee released its report in February detailing the allegations. The audit says the council gave itself salary increases of 35 percent in fiscal year 2013 and that at least one council member gave loans to family members. The committee said it also found that council members received bonuses with no evidence that those bonuses were approved by the council.

The corruption allegations surfaced when the tribe's gambling commission learned about casino-funded debit cards that were issued to tribal employees and council members as bonuses and payments.

Blackhawk declined to comment about the allegations.

"I lost my motivation," he said. "I'm very proud of my service."

Two other council members have recently resigned, and another has been suspended.

The tribal council has not found an interim chairperson to complete the rest of Blackhawk's term. The former chairman was up for re-election in October. According to Sharon Redhorn-Chamberlain, a community group leader, the tribe may need to consider emergency measures to ensure that the government can continue.



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