

Firefighters Battle Blaze In Lincoln

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Lincoln fire officials say a roofing crew caused a fire that broke out at a downtown strip mall. According to city Fire Investigator Rick Campos, construction workers were using a blow torch on gutters above a hookah lounge when combustible material transferred to the roof and set it on fire. Campos estimates the damage to be worth between \$1.5 million and \$2 million. Authorities said everyone escaped the Monday blaze uninjured before flames gutted most of the building that is valued at \$635,000. One firefighter and a dog managed to escape a partial collapse of the roof. “They pulled out 30 seconds before the collapse,” Lincoln Fire and Rescue Battalion Chief Murrell said. According to Murrell, the collapse forced firefighters into a defensive mode for a time as they sought options to get water into areas of the building that still contained flames. The *Lincoln Journal Star* says thick, black and brown smoke spilled across part of the downtown area as crowds gathered to watch firefighters on ladders and on the ground battle the three-alarm fire. Reserve crews were called in to help fight the blaze, which authorities say damaged neighboring businesses. Guillermo Haro, who owns an ethnic grocery store and restaurant, watched as flames tore through the strip mall his business has called home for more than 15 years. “Not good,” said Haro. “Lot of years here.”

Deaths In House Fire Shake Residents

BRANDON (AP) — The death of a volunteer fireman and a homeowner in a Brandon house fire has shaken residents in the area as well as the firefighting community. Steven Ackerman, 38, with the fire department in nearby Valley Springs, died late Sunday in the blaze that also killed homeowner David Smith, 47. The cause of the fire was not immediately determined but authorities do not consider it suspicious. Firefighter deaths in South Dakota are uncommon. Ackerman is the 43rd firefighter to die in the line of duty in the state since 1924, and only the 22nd volunteer firefighter, according to the South Dakota Firefighters Association. “Nobody is immune to this type of danger in this type of occupation,” President Charlie Kludt told KDLT-TV. “Firefighters go into buildings that people are running out of.” Ackerman was a volunteer firefighter for 14 years, according to the *Argus Leader* newspaper. He worked with a family heating and cooling business and served on the town’s planning and zoning commission. “He was a good guy who cared a lot about his community,” said Sadie Den Herder, who worked at a cafe and gas station that Ackerman frequented. Members of Smith’s family told KELO-TV that they are still in shock over his death. “He was really fun, caring. He always had something to say that was funny,” said 15-year-old daughter Makenzie Smith, who escaped the fire but couldn’t save her father. “He was a really caring, loving dad. He’ll be missed by a lot of people.”

Vote

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The opt-out election required only a simple majority for passage. This year’s 73 percent approval is slightly less than the 80 percent passage in the previous election, according to figures from Poll. The Centerville district uses the opt-out money for general expenses, she said. **DELMONT:** By the margin of a single vote, residents in this Douglas County community have tightened their city animal ordinance. Tuesday’s vote changed the city ordinance regarding the prohibition of keeping exotic or other large animals inside the Delmont city limits. According to the ballot explanation, the “yes” vote will now include the keeping of insects, fowl and certain animals within the city limits. The vote also changes the affected area from the former less than 5 acres to the new less than 11 acres. In addition, the change also increases the fine from the former \$200 per violation to the new \$500 per violation. The vote also amends the section with respect to animals exempt from the ordinance. In addition, it changes the effective date and conditions under which the grandfather clause is applicable. In the lone council race, Robert Hotchkiss defeated Cindy Louise Hoff 21-16 for a two-year term as Ward III alderperson. **ELK POINT:** In the city election, voters chose two new faces for two-year terms on the City Council. In Ward II, challenger Lance Penfield defeated incumbent Neil Leitru 44-15 for a two-year term. In Ward III, challenger Kenneth VonHaden defeated incumbent Myra Honomichi 41-32. **FREEMAN:** Voters headed to

the polls for both city and school races in the joint city/school election. In the City Council election, voters chose the challenger in both races. In the Ward I race saw challenger Gary Block defeated incumbent Charlie Gering 59-56. Ward I covers the northern portion of the city. The Ward II race saw challenger Russ Becker defeat incumbent Steve “Charley” Waltnor 81-62. Ward II covers much of the south central and southeastern part of the city. In the school board race, two new faces will take office. Challengers Corey Gall and Mark Miller claimed the two seats with a respective 318 and 278 votes. The rest of the field included challenger Kyle Weier with 180 and incumbent Darnell Tschetter with 166. One newcomer was guaranteed, as incumbent Chris Lickteig didn’t run for re-election. **SCOTLAND:** In the city election, challenger Tim Asche defeated incumbent H. Victor Settje 68-33 for a two-year term as Ward I alderman. The election drew 101 of 246 eligible voters for 41 percent turnout. **SPRINGFIELD:** In the city election, incumbent John Evenson defeated challenger David Balvin 40-14 for a two-year term as Ward II alderman on the council. The election drew 54 of 100 eligible voters for 54 percent turnout. **TRIPP:** In the city election, challenger John M. Friman defeated incumbent Scott R. Schelske 27-19 for a two-year term as Ward II alderman. The election drew 46 of 110 registered voters for 42 percent turnout. **WAGNER:** In the city election, incumbent Todd Johannsen defeated challenger Edward E. Stimpson 62-20 for a two-year term as Ward III alderman. The election drew 82 of 374 registered voters for 22 percent voter turnout.

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Officials Completing Final Work For Airspace Expansion

BY JAMES NORD
Associated Press

PIERRE — Federal officials are completing the final work required on a newly approved aerial training area over the northern Plains, and military bombers could begin roaring overhead as soon as September. The U.S. Air Force could be able to begin using at least parts of the expanded Powder River Training Complex over the Dakotas, Montana and Wyoming as soon as the Federal Aviation Administration completes mapping work on the training airspace, an Air Force spokeswoman said Tuesday. The FAA approved the plan last month to roughly quadruple the training airspace to span nearly 35,000 square miles, making it the largest over the continental U.S. The airspace will be used by B-1 bombers from Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota and B-52 bombers from Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota. The Air Force says the expansion will significantly boost training opportunities for Ellsworth and Minot aircrews. It’s expected to save Ellsworth up to \$23 million a year in fuel costs by reducing the number of training flights to other states.

But before aircrews can start practicing in the newly expanded training area, the FAA has to publish the airspace expansion in its aeronautical maps, Air Force Spokeswoman Ann Stefanek said in a statement. That publication is expected in September, but it will only open up certain parts of the training area. The full airspace won’t be open until an aircraft recall communications system is installed, said Quasi Al-Haj, who oversees the western part of the state for U.S. Sen. John Thune’s office. Thune has been pushing for the expansion since 2006. Al-Haj said the system is necessary to help prevent inconveniences for other aviators in the area and to ensure that aircraft can be recalled in an emergency. Stefanek said the Air Force currently has no firm date for when the installation of the communications system will be complete but called the project’s completion a “high priority.” Under the plan, any given location across the training area could experience up to nine low-altitude overflights annually. Supersonic flights would be limited to 10 days a year during large-scale exercises involving roughly 20 aircraft.

The Air Force has said as many as 88 civilian flights a day could be delayed when the large-scale exercises are conducted, but that number would likely be smaller. Elected leaders in Montana have said the bombers would disrupt rural communities. Gov. Steve Bullock wrote in a mid-March letter to the FAA that the expansion “would be at the expense of the livelihoods and economic prosperity of Montanans.” Opponents could petition to have the FAA decision to allow the expansion reviewed by an appeals court. Lawmakers and Air Force officials are also thinking longer-term. South Dakota U.S. Rep. Kristi Noem has been working to get funding for an expensive, specialized device used to electronically simulate enemy air defenses. Noem’s office said a site in Belle Fourche is expected to get one of the training aids in fiscal year 2019, which would be an improvement over current capabilities. A spokesman for the Air Force’s Air Combat Command Airspace, Ranges, and Airfield Operations Division said in a written statement the Joint Threat Emitter “provides a wider array of simulated threats.”

Nebraska

Senators Reject Increase In Tipped Minimum Wage

BY ANNA GRONEWOLD
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Nebraska lawmakers on Tuesday rejected an effort to increase the hourly wage for tipped workers, a move that means waiters and waitresses will continue to be paid the same per hour as they have since 1991. By a 27 to 18 vote, legislators dismissed a measure by Omaha Sen. Jeremy Nordquist that would have gradually increased the hourly wage for tipped workers until it reached 50 percent of the standard minimum wage, or about \$4.50 in 2017. Opponents said the bill would create burdens for small or rural restaurants, but Nordquist argued the 24-year-old tipped minimum wage has fallen in value and doesn’t provide enough stability for restaurant workers struggling to make ends meet. Nebraska’s tipped minimum wage is lower than 32 other states. The decision by lawmakers came months after voters last November approved a higher standard minimum wage. Nebraska’s minimum wage increased from \$7.25 to \$8 an hour on Jan. 1, and is scheduled to rise again to \$9 in 2016. Supporters of that effort gathered signatures to get the measure on the ballot after the Legislature turned down a proposed wage increase. “It’s disappointing that the Legislature has turned a deaf ear to ...the position of the majority of Nebraskans, which is that hard work should pay,” Nordquist said “If you work 40 hours a week, you should be able to support your families.” But Sen. John Murante of Gretna, who man-

ages Big Fred’s Pizza in Omaha, said because restaurant size and quality dictate gratuities, the minimum tipped wage cannot be a one-size-fits-all law like standard minimum wage. “These are people that functionally, in the real world, work on commission,” Murante said. “Whether they’re making \$2.13 or that number goes up, it doesn’t change the fact that at the end of the day their bread is buttered by the tips they make, not by the hourly wages they make.” Murante said he fears higher hourly wages could actually hurt employees by motivating managers to cut waiters’ shifts short, limiting their abilities to earn more tips. Federal and state laws require employers to make up the difference if employee tips fall short of the standard minimum wage during a pay period. “Minimum wage is being paid. The stability is already there,” Sen. Dave Bloomfield of Hoskins said in opposition to the bill. “They know they’re going to have at least \$9 an hour.” But Nordquist said the law is poorly enforced and few employees know they are entitled to minimum wage if the night’s tips don’t add up. At the bill’s public hearing, a representative for the Nebraska Restaurant Association said he did not know how often employees were educated on the law. From 2010 to 2012 the U.S. Department of Labor conducted nearly 9,000 restaurant investigations nationwide. The wage violation rate of the investigated restaurants was 83.8 percent. “The next step for us is to make sure we are very strict on enforcing the law that is on the books in holding those restaurants accountable,” Nordquist said.

SEN. JEREMY NORDQUIST

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