

SD Wildfire Now 80 Percent Contained

RAPID CITY (AP) — A wildfire in Wind Cave National Park remains at 10 square miles but is now 80 percent contained. Authorities say the Cold Brook Fire has scorched 6,500 acres in the southwestern South Dakota park. That's about 20 percent of the park's surface area.

About 80 people have been working on the scene to contain the blaze, and they expect to have it fully contained Friday. Park Chief Interpreter Tom Farrell says cooler temperatures and higher humidity helped crews control the fire Wednesday.

The blaze began Monday afternoon when a prescribed burn grew out of control in high winds. There have been no injuries or damages to structures.

Park facilities remain open, though backcountry and hiking trails are closed, along with a couple of roads.

Judge Awards Man For Herbicide Case

HARTFORD (AP) — A South Dakota jury has awarded \$160,000 to a man who alleges that the herbicide used by a co-op killed ponderosa trees on his property.

The Argus Leader reports the jury awarded the money in the lawsuit that Hartford resident Richard Krier filed against Hartford Farmer's Elevator.

Krier sued the co-op after over 200 ponderosas along the edge of his acreage died within a year of June 2010, when he caught sprayers with the co-op pelting fields of crops with a weed killer. Trees beyond Krier's property line survived.

Expert witnesses during the trial presented differing reasons for the trees' destruction. The co-op argued the trees died because of soil saturation.

Hartford Elevator's attorney Lisa Prostrullo says the co-op is considering whether to appeal the jury's decision.

Hospitals, Ambulances To Get A New Tool

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska hospitals and ambulance services will receive a life-saving tool as part of a nearly \$6 million grant.

Approximately 360 ambulance services and 80 hospitals will receive the Physio-Control LUCAS 2 chest compression system, a medical device that provides automatic chest compressions to adults in cardiac arrest. Lt. Gov. Mike Foley announced the award Wednesday at the Capitol.

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Service's emergency medical services program will help coordinate the purchase and distribution of the devices.

Judge Appointed To Third Judicial Circuit

BROOKINGS (AP) — A new presiding judge has been appointed to the Third Judicial Circuit in South Dakota.

South Dakota Supreme Court Chief Justice David Gilbertson on Wednesday announced the appointment of Judge Gregory Stoltenburg. A presiding judge is an administrative leader in his or her respective circuit.

The Third Judicial Circuit encompasses 14 counties in eastern South Dakota including Brookings, Hamlin, Moody and Sanborn.

Stoltenburg appointment will be effective in June, following the retirement of Judge Tim Tucker.

Lincoln Arena Leafleting Request Denied

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A federal judge has denied a request to temporarily block limits on leafleting and other activities outside Lincoln's Pinnacle Bank Arena.

Larry Ball was arrested last year and again in March for handing out religious leaflets outside the arena. Days after his last arrest, Ball filed a civil rights lawsuit against the city, the mayor, police chief and arena operator.

Ball contends the area where activity is restricted is a public area, violating free speech liberties. The city says the area is quasi-public and that it has the right to limit protests and leafleting on it.

Thune Meets With Producers



PHOTO: OFFICE OF SEN. JOHN THUNE

Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) met with South Dakota Pork Producers Council members (from left to right) Lorin Pankratz from Sioux Falls, Ray Epp from Mission Hill, Craig Andersen from Centerville, Matt Storm from Mount Vernon, Lester Moeller from St. Lawrence and Glenn Mueller from Sioux Falls in Washington Wednesday.

Republican Senators Rally Against Nebraska Death Penalty

BY ANNA GRONEWOLD
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Seven Republican senators announced their support for a bill to repeal the capital punishment law, saying Wednesday that any other program so costly and inefficient would have been eliminated by the Legislature years ago.

Lincoln Sen. Colby Coash said repealing the death penalty aligns with the conservative values he and others campaigned on, since it squanders tax money on endless appeals — especially since the state lacks the drug to carry out executions.

"A lot of us said things like this: 'Send me to Lincoln, I'll find, I'll root out, I'll get rid of government waste wherever I can find it,'" he said. "And that's what repealing the death penalty is about."

Nebraska, which last carried out an execution in 1997, currently has 11 men on death row. That most-recent execution was by electrocution, a method the Nebraska Supreme Court declared cruel and unusual in 2008.

The state's supply of the

required anesthetic for lethal injections, sodium thiopental, expired in December 2013. The drug is no longer produced in the United States, and European Union countries are prohibited from selling the drug for use in capital punishment. The state Department of Correctional Services has not obtained a new supply of the drug.

Nebraska's death row inmates thus wait for a sentence that cannot be carried out. Death penalty sentencing also carries additional costs because of more legal preparation, separate sentencing, post-conviction appeals and the need to house those inmates apart from the general prison population.

A 2014 report by the Kansas Judicial Council found that a death row prisoner in the state costs \$49,380 to house per year, compared with a general population prisoner cost of \$24,690. The report also found that cases in which the death penalty was sought cost nearly four times as much as cases in which it was not sought.

Bellevue Sen. Tommy Garrett said taxpayer dollars

aside, the death penalty gives state governments the "power to play God," which conflicts with his beliefs.

"I believe in the sanctity of life," Garrett said. "I believe life begins at conception and should be protected until God calls the individual home."

Marc Hyden, advocacy coordinator for Conservatives Concerned about the Death Penalty, said eliminating capital punishment can unite political parties.

"This can bring us together for different reasons," Hyden said. "Mine is about protecting innocent life and promoting fiscal responsibility in government and supporting programs that actually work. It's not just a liberal issue, it's a conservative issue."

The Legislature is expected to debate the repeal Thursday, but the bill will likely face opposition.

Lawmakers who support the death penalty said the costs and legal hurdles have grown because of deliberate efforts by those who oppose the practice to prevent the state from carrying out executions.

Minimum Wage Bill Advances

BY ANNA GRONEWOLD
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Some Nebraska teenagers could receive a lower minimum wage next year under a proposed measure that opponents called an attempt to unwind the will of the state's voters.

Lawmakers voted 32-11 Wednesday to advance a measure that would create a new class defined as "young student workers," high schoolers under 18 years old who would continue to earn \$8 an hour in 2016 when the standard minimum increases to \$9.

The bill by Sen. Laura Ebke of Crete and backed by the Nebraska Grocery Industry Association, has been touted as a way for small-town grocery stores to provide part-time jobs for local students without going out of business.

But Sen. Jeremy Nordquist of Omaha called the bill an "affront to our democracy." Nordquist led a petition process to place minimum wage on the ballot last year after the measure failed to gain enough support in the Legislature. Voters increased the wage from \$7.25 to \$8 an hour on Jan. 1. It is scheduled to rise again to \$9 in 2016.

"Folks, it is time to put this issue to rest, to stand with the voters who clearly made their voices heard last November, just a few months ago," Nordquist said. "And now we're going to open our ears to the special interest (lobbyists) behind the glass? Is that the way our democracy is supposed to work? Absolutely not."

But Nordquist said the measure is also bad policy for communities like his South Omaha district, where high school jobs are essential for students living below the poverty level.

Athletes

FROM PAGE 1

June 9-10 meeting. If the \$300 proposal is adopted, it would take effect after the final vote.

"Nobody I'm aware of is as low as us," John Krogstrand, an assistant executive director for SDHSAA, said Wednesday.

The value of the merchandise already can be increased by the amount of the camp fee or entry fee. A \$20 camp fee, for example, would allow \$95 in value under the current limit.

Krogstrand said \$400 to \$500 seems to be a common range in other states. The U.S. Golf Association sets its amateur threshold at \$750.

Accepting cash or some variation such as a debit card would remain a violation.

The SDHSAA doesn't have a reporting requirement regarding the \$75 limit and doesn't have a formal mechanism for monitoring value of merchandise.

Krogstrand said self-reporting can be one way that possible infractions come to light. Another, he said, is that people can tell on each other.

Top distance runners have been invited to major regional or national events where shoes that were given to the athletes would surpass South Dakota's \$75 limit.

Krogstrand said the \$300 would allow for a pair of shoes and a warm-up suit.

The association already has provided exemptions in instances such as the Lakota Nation Invitational basketball tournament, where coats and other merchandise have been awarded to participants.

"It can never be cash. It always has to be merchandise," Krogstrand said. "It's a per-instance thing."

Football combines and basketball camps are two more types of events where merchandise sometimes is awarded.

That generally doesn't affect a high school student's eligibility to play college under NCAA and NAIA rules.

"As I understand it, merchandise, equipment or apparel are not an issue, but much like our policy, cash payments are," Krogstrand said.

"There would be some restrictions on providing items to an athlete during the recruiting process, but their participation in a 'Nike Nationals' event or a 'Under Armour Combine' would not be a violation at the NCAA (or) NAIA level," he said.

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