

MIDWEST DIGEST

Seat-Belt Law Would Get Neb. \$7.8 Million

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Kansas got \$11.2 million from the federal government last week for adopting a tougher seat-belt law. So how much would Nebraska get if it approved a similar law?

Officials say Nebraska would get \$7.8 million if it were to pass a law that would allow police to pull over vehicles with occupants not wearing seat belts.

Currently, drivers can be ticketed for not wearing seat belts only if they have first been pulled over for other infractions.

If Nebraska lawmakers were to pass a tougher seat-belt law, all but \$1 million would have to be used for safety engineering, construction or a combination of both.

Last year, a bill in the Legislature that would have made not wearing seat belts a primary offense was killed in committee.

Fire Damages Fort Pierre Business

FORT PIERRE (AP) — Fire has heavily damaged a Fort Pierre business.

Officials estimate damage at First Dakota Enterprises and Baumann Lumber on Sunday evening at \$100,000.

Fire Chief Rick Cronin says the blaze is not suspicious. He says it started in the employee kitchen where items including plastic forks and plates had been left on the stove with a burner that was turned on.

Cronin says the fire destroyed the kitchen and damaged nearby offices but did not spread into the main construction shop area.

Firm Proposes Wind Farm Near Ogallala

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A Michigan company has announced its wishes to build a \$20 million, 10-megawatt wind farm southeast of Ogallala.

Area officials rallied around the proposal from Bad Axe, Mich.-based Green Oak Renewables on Monday.

Nebraska Public Power District has asked for proposals to build a renewable energy project in the state that the district would buy energy from, and Green Oak is the first to publicly announce its plans to submit a proposal.

Proposals are due Sept. 1 and the selected project would help NPPD meet its goal of having 10 percent of its energy come from renewable sources by 2020.

The proposed wind farm near Ogallala would have five turbines.

Nebraska Man Gets 80-130 Years

KEARNEY, Neb. (AP) — A 23-year-old Minden man has been given 80-to-130 years in prison for holding several people hostage in a Kearney bank last winter.

Last month Jonathon Buckley pleaded no contest to four counts of kidnapping and a weapons charge following an armed standoff at the Wells Fargo Bank branch in February. He was sentenced on Monday by Judge John Icenogle of Buffalo County District Court.

Buckley had been charged with five counts of kidnapping, one count of robbery and one count of using a firearm to commit a felony. The charges were reduced in a plea deal.

Authorities say Buckley was armed with a shotgun but didn't fire any shots.

Prosecutors determined that Buckley entered the bank not to rob it but to get attention from local media and law enforcement.

Omaha Police Release Name Of Lake Victim

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Police have released the name of an Omaha man who died after being pulled from Carter Lake on the east side of Omaha.

In a police news release Monday, he was identified as 52-year-old Eugene Sharp.

The release says officers were called to the scene at Levi Carter Park a little after 1 a.m. Monday.

Investigators say Sharp and two friends had been fishing since late Sunday night. The friends told investigators that Sharp had gone into the water and was pretending to drown. When he didn't resurface for air, they went in and pulled him to shore.

Police say Sharp was pronounced dead at an Omaha hospital a little before 1:40 a.m.

The lake is shared by Omaha and Carter Lake, Iowa, which is surrounded by Omaha on the west side of the Missouri River.

SD Gets \$1M Through Affordable Care Act

PIERRE (AP) — South Dakota is getting \$1 million to help crack down on unreasonable health insurance premium increases.

Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius on Monday announced the grants through the Affordable Care Act.

The act is providing states with \$250 million in grants over five years. The government says the goal is to help improve how states review proposed health insurance premium hikes and hold insurance companies accountable for unjustified increases.

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Thune Wants Congress To Move To Biennial Budget

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — Republican Sen. John Thune of South Dakota says Congress should go to a biennial federal budget to get the unwieldy process under control.

Thune, speaking Monday at a Sioux Falls Chamber of Commerce luncheon, said he doesn't think Congress can effectively govern a \$4 trillion budget each year by having to consider and debate 12 separate appropriations bills, most of which never get passed.

Thune said budgets could be passed in odd-number years when people are not running for office.

"In the even-number year, when people are running for office, you can actually look at how to save people money," Thune said. "Congress could do oversight, which it has a respon-

sibility to do."

Thune said there are 26 committees or subcommittees that spend money, yet "we don't have a committee in Congress that saves money."

The Republican proposes creating a permanent standing committee, split equally between Republicans and Democrats and Senate and House members, charged with finding wasteful spending in the budget. Its sole job would be to find at least 10 percent reduction in deficit, and it would have to be done by reducing spending.

Thune said there's currently a lot of policy uncertainty coming out of Washington, and investors hate uncertainty.

He said entrepreneurs looking at starting or expanding businesses, hiring people or buying new equipment are sitting on the

sidelines until they know what the rules will be regarding dividends, capital gains, estate taxes and whether the Bush tax cuts for people making more than \$250,000 expire will be extended.

President Barack Obama wants to let a series of tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans that were enacted during the administration of Republican President George W. Bush expire on schedule in January.

"I can't think of anything worse you can do, in the middle of recession, than raise taxes on small businesses," Thune said.

Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner earlier this month said extending the tax cuts for the wealthy would be a \$700 billion mistake. He said wealthy families are more likely to save the money, which doesn't help the economy in the short run.

Omaha Man Found Not Guilty Of Fatally Injuring Dog

BY NELSON LAMPE
Associated Press Writer

OMAHA, Neb. — A 59-year-old Omaha man who was accused of fatally injuring his neighbor's rat terrier was found not guilty by reason of insanity Monday.

Kevin Cleavenger had been charged with felony intentional cruelty to an animal, an offense that carried a maximum of five years in prison.

After announcing her verdict, Judge Leigh Ann Retelsdorf of Douglas County District Court ordered Cleavenger to be evaluated on an outpatient basis at the state psychiatric hospital in Lincoln.

Cleavenger's attorney, Adam Sipple, said physicians at Lincoln Regional Center will develop a treatment plan that could involve in-house care. They'll submit that plan to the judge, who will decide whether Cleavenger should be confined. She'll likely announce her

decision in November, Sipple said.

The incident last year was Cleavenger's first criminal trouble, Sipple said.

"Medical opinion is that he suffered from a paranoid delusion when the offense occurred," Sipple said. "Evidence would indicate that when he is on his medications he's healthy."

Prosecutor Tom McKenney said the insanity verdict was "the only decision we could come to," given the medical experts' testimony.

Catalina Snyder told authorities that Cleavenger knocked on her door in April 2009 and said he was upset about her dog barking outside their apartment building.

Snyder told police she later heard yelling and saw Cleavenger slamming her dog to the ground. The rat terrier, named Pom-poo, was euthanized because of his injuries.

Cleavenger has since moved but remains in Omaha, Sipple said.

Neb. Getting \$1M To Monitor Health Insurance Rates

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska is getting \$1 million to monitor health insurance premium increases, federal officials said Monday.

The funding was announced in a news release from the office of Secretary Kathleen Sebelius of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Nebraska will use the Affordable Care Act funding to help improve oversight of health insurance premium increases, take action against insurers seeking unreasonable rate hikes and ensure Nebraskans receive value for their premium dollars, Sebelius said.

"We will continue to work with state to ensure consumers are receiving value for their premium dollars and to avoid the kind of double-digit premium increases seen recently," she said.

Nebraska said in its grant application that it will provide information about health insur-

South Dakota Ballot Measures Pamphlet Available

PIERRE (AP) — Secretary of State Chris Nelson says a pamphlet is available that includes information on the four ballot questions South Dakota voters will decide during the Nov. 2 election.

Nelson on Monday said the pamphlet was available online and that printed copies would be available at every county auditor's office and each public library within the week.

People who want the pamphlet in large print, Braille or on tape should contact the State Library.

The pamphlet includes the title of each ballot question, the attorney general's explanation of the measure, and statements both for and against each measure. Those statements are submitted by proponents and opponents of each ballot question.

The pamphlet can be viewed at: <http://www.sdsos.gov/elections/voterregistration/electvoter/pdfs/2010/2010%20BQ%20Pamphlet&Cover>.

ance rates on the state Department of Insurance's website and hire an actuary to conduct detailed reviews of rate filings.

The state also will determine whether to require additional information in health insurance premium filings, as well as inform consumers of when health insurance premium increases take effect.

The state's grant also indicated the state will upgrade its systems to support consumer outreach and medical trend review and establish a data center to compile and publish fee schedule information.

Nebraska is one of 45 states and Washington, D.C., sharing \$46 million for a range of projects to help states strengthen their oversight of health insurance rate hikes. It's the first installment of \$250 million for state regulators in the new health care law.

SD Man Wins Sheep-Shearing Champion

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (AP) — The Illinois State Fair Sheep Shearing Contest's champion is from South Dakota.

Fair officials say 38-year-old Loren Opstedahl of Peadmont, S.D., won this year's competition. Opstedahl was a top qualifier at this year's 2010 World Championship. He was the sheep shearing national champion in 2006 and 2010.

This is the third time Opstedahl has been Illinois State Fair's champion. He's been shearing sheep for 21 years.



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