

Former First Lady To Be Deputy Sec. Of State

PIERRE (AP) — Former South Dakota first lady Pat Miller will become deputy secretary of state.

Secretary of State Jason Gant says he hired Miller as his deputy because she has extensive experience as an administrator in business and state government.

Miller is married to former Gov. Walter Dale Miller, who was governor from 1993 until 1995.

She is president of the South Dakota Historical Foundation and previously was chief executive officer of Easter Seals of South Dakota.

Miller will start work as deputy secretary of state on Sept. 4. The secretary of state's office supervises elections, handles registration of corporations and keeps official state documents.

Wind Can Generate 22 Percent Of Electricity

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — A new report from the U.S. Energy Department says that South Dakota in 2011 had the capacity to generate about 22 percent of its electricity from wind energy, ranking first among all states.

Energy Secretary Steven Chu says that wind power represented 32 percent of all new electric capacity additions in the United States last year and accounted for \$14 billion in new investment.

The department says that the percentage of wind equipment made in America also increased dramatically.

Nearly 70 percent of the wind turbines, towers, blades, gears and generators installed at U.S. wind farms last year come from domestic manufacturers, doubling from 35 percent in 2005.

Aberdeen's Molded Fiber Glass manufactures turbine blades in South Dakota.

Trial Set For Couple On Underage Drinking Bust

CANTON (AP) — A former South Dakota school board president has an Oct. 25 trial date on charges that she allowed an underage drinking party on her property.

Michelle Schirado and her husband Brian face two misdemeanor charges. Each one carries a possible penalty of a year in jail and a \$2,000 fine. Their lawyer appeared in court Wednesday to plead not guilty on the Schirados' behalf.

Michelle Schirado is the former president of the school board in Harrisburg, S.D., southeast of Sioux Falls. Last May, more than 20 teenagers were cited for drinking on the Schirados' property a day after Harrisburg High School held its graduation ceremony.

Michelle Schirado was president of the school board when the incident happened. She's still on the board, but she is no longer the president.

Drought Helping To Spread West Nile Virus

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — South Dakota's dry summer has helped spread the West Nile virus.

A state report says there have been 41 confirmed cases of the mosquito-borne illness this year. That's the biggest number since 2007. One person has died from the disease.

South Dakota disease specialist Lon Kightlinger says the actual number of West Nile cases is much higher. Most people don't know they have the virus, but it can cause body aches, chills and low-grade fever.

Health officials say this summer's dry weather has made people worry less about mosquitoes. But the type of mosquito that carries the virus does well in dry weather with occasional rain.

Kightlinger tells the Sioux Falls *Argus Leader* that doctors should order a blood test if they suspect a patient has West Nile.

Mom Of Slain Girl Plans To Witness Execution

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — The mother of a Sioux Falls girl who was raped and murdered says she plans to witness the execution of her daughter's killer.

Tina Curl's 9-year-old daughter, Becky O'Connell, was killed in 1990. She was abducted from a Sioux Falls convenience store, raped and murdered.

Donald Moeller was convicted of killing the girl and sentenced to death. Moeller has contested his case in the courts for years. But his lawyer says now that Moeller doesn't want any more delays. No date has been set yet for his execution.

Curl now lives in New York state. She tells KELO-TV she'll be there when Moeller is executed. She says she "won't get any peace of mind" until Moeller is dead, "and I will be there to see it."

UNO Increases Security After Assault Report

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The University of Nebraska at Omaha says security has been increased after a student reported being sexually assaulted by a man in her dormitory room.

The university sent students an email saying a student at the Scott Village resident hall reported the assault Tuesday morning. In the email Tuesday night, the university says the student didn't recognize the man and it's unclear how he entered her room.

Omaha police are in charge of the investigation. Omaha police and UNO security have increased their presence on campus.

Students are asked to lock their doors, secure windows and make sure they know who's at the door before opening it.

Jury Selection Complete In S.D. Rape Trial

HURON (AP) — A jury of 10 women and three men has been selected for the trial of a South Dakota bar owner accused of raping a 12-year-old girl and two 14-year-olds after serving them booze.

KOKK radio reports that the jury of 12 jurors plus one alternate was selected Wednesday afternoon in the trial of 35-year-old Werner Fajardo. Prosecutors allege Fajardo provided alcohol to the three girls at his El Cuervo bar in Huron and assaulted them. He's pleaded not guilty.

Opening statements are scheduled for Thursday morning.

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Neb. To Host Health Exchange Meeting

BY GRANT SCHULTE
The Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman turned to the public Wednesday for suggestions on how to create a statewide health insurance exchange, a key piece of the federal health care law designed to steer users toward a coverage plan.

The Republican governor announced a series of meetings that will start later this month and be held throughout the state. Health care providers and advocates for children, the poor, taxpayers and the insurance industry have been invited to participate.

"We're trying to keep the process very open, very public," Heineman said at a news conference. "We want to hear from citizens, and we think now is the appropriate time now that we're getting a lot closer to this final decision."

The public meetings come as the state prepares a blueprint for a health exchange that is due to the federal government on Nov. 16. The exchanges are online markets in which consumers and small businesses can shop for health insurance and see if they qualify for federal tax credits aimed at lower-income residents.

Heineman said the meetings will focus on health exchanges, but he repeated his opposition to any proposals to extend Medicaid coverage to more Nebraska residents. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that the federal government cannot penalize states that choose not to expand Medicaid, as was required in the federal law.

Health care advocates argue that the Medicaid expansion is critical: Unless more Nebraskans are allowed to participate, some will have incomes too high to qualify for the program but too low to receive the federal tax credits.

The federal law picks up the entire cost of covering more people for the first three years,



Heineman

and then drops to 90 percent, with states covering the remaining 10 percent. Supporters say it's a great deal compared to current Medicaid rates wherein Washington pays as little as half of the cost in some states.

Heineman said the expansion would drain state money that should instead go to K-12 public schools, colleges and the University of Nebraska.

Supporters of the federal health care law cheered Wednesday's announcement, although some said the Legislature still needs to create an independent governing board to oversee the exchange. Nebraska Department of Insurance Director Bruce Ramage has said the Department of Insurance, under Heineman's administration, is the best equipped to manage and oversee the exchange.

Omaha Sen. Jeremy Nordquist, a Democrat who supports the federal health care law, introduced a measure during this year's session that would have created a 12-member board to oversee the exchange. The proposal was shelved, as state officials waited for the U.S. Supreme Court to rule on the health care law.

"After the Supreme Court ruled, my first point was the governor needs to make this a more open and transparent process," Nordquist said. "Up until that point, all of the decisions and studies had been going on behind closed doors. I'm pleased that he's now responded to that criticism by moving forward with some public meetings in the coming weeks, and I hope that Nebraskans get engaged in this."

Heineman said he has invited more than 30 advocacy groups to the meetings in Lincoln. He said executives from two of the state's three largest health insurance companies — Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Nebraska, Coventry Health Care of Nebraska and United Health

Care — have already agreed to participate.

The other meetings will take place on Aug. 27 in Gering, Aug. 28 in Kearney, Aug. 30 in Nebraska City, Sept. 10 in Omaha and Sept. 12 in South Sioux City.

"We have asked these stakeholders to come prepared to discuss which exchange option they prefer, why, and how they would fund it," the governor said.

Heineman has ordered state officials to prepare an exchange to meet the federal deadline, but the department won't start enacting it until after the November elections.

Ramage said the meetings will give the public a chance to question the state's exchange-planning team. Each gathering will start with a presentation, followed by an informal discussion and a question-and-answer session.

An estimated 28,400 uninsured Nebraskans would qualify for coverage if the state expanded Medicaid coverage, according to the Department of Insurance.

Nebraska Appleseed, a public interest group that advocates for low-income residents, applauded the announcement as "a positive first step" toward creating an exchange.

"Our focus should always be on how to make these opportunities work for Nebraskans and having input from the public is critical to achieving that goal," the group's health care access director, Jennifer Carter, said in a statement.

A few lawmakers have questioned the governor's authority to move forward with a health exchange without direct input from the Legislature. Heineman countered that the state constitution grants his administration "supreme executive power" to design a plan and submit an exchange to federal authorities to protect Nebraska's interests.

Nordquist said he won't oppose the governor as long as the process stays transparent. If it isn't, he said he will resubmit a bill to create a public governing board.

EPA To Approve Grain Sorghum For Cleaner Ethanol

BY BLAKE NICHOLSON
The Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. — The federal government is on the verge of approving a grain mainly used as livestock feed to make a cleaner version of ethanol, a decision officials say could give farmers a new moneymaking opportunity, boost the biofuels industry and help the environment.

A plant in western Kansas already is gearing up to take advantage, launching a multimillion-dollar renovation so it can be the first to turn sorghum — a plant similar in appearance to corn — into advanced ethanol. Advanced biofuels result in even less lifetime greenhouse gas production than conventional biofuels, measuring from the time a crop is planted to when the fuel is burned in a vehicle.

The only advanced biofuels in the United States now are sugar cane-based ethanol imported from Brazil and domestic biodiesel, a mixture of petroleum diesel and renewable sources such as soybean oil, said Matt Hartwig, spokesman for the Renewable Fuels Association. Advanced ethanol made from sorghum would give the nation another option as it aims to meet the federal goal of producing 36 billion gallons of renewable fuels per year by 2022.

"We need to continue to expand the base of feedstocks from which we produce biofuel," Hartwig said. "It's a good first step."

Almost all the ethanol produced in the U.S. now is conventional ethanol made from corn starch. Critics of the ethanol industry complain too much corn is going to energy production, resulting in higher food prices for consumers. Corn affects food prices in multiple ways because it's a widely used ingredient in food manufacturing and it's used to feed livestock.

More grain sorghum going to fuel production is unlikely to spark the same complaints, because it is not the main ingredient in a number of foods. While it can be used in human food, it's sold mainly to feed poultry, cattle and other livestock. Sweet sorghum produces edible syrup.

Sorghum also has environmental advantages. It is more tolerant of drought than other crops, including corn, and it produces about the same amount of ethanol per bushel as corn while requiring one-third less water.

It's less often used than corn in conventional ethanol because corn is much more plentiful, Hartwig said — U.S. corn acres this year outnumber sorghum acres about 16 to one. Also, most ethanol plants are in the Corn Belt focused around Iowa and Illinois, while sorghum is grown primarily in the central and southern Great Plains. Along with Kansas, the top producers are Colorado, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Dakota and Texas.

The Environmental Protection Agency has concluded that

ethanol made from grain sorghum can qualify as an advanced biofuel if it's made at plants with the proper green technology. The agency has taken public comments and will issue a final determination later. No time frame has been set.

Its approval would make sorghum-based ethanol more attractive because advanced ethanol commands a higher price than conventional, said Chris Cogburn, strategic business director for the National Sorghum Producers.

The question, Hartwig said, is whether ethanol producers are willing to install the equipment needed to produce advanced ethanol from sorghum.

"It has great potential for the future and (is) something the industry will be exploring, but we don't know about the impact here in the near future," he said.

Western Plains Energy LLC in Oakley, Kan., which makes conventional ethanol, aims to be the first to upgrade to that technology. The plant is installing equipment that will use methane gas from cattle manure rather than natural gas, cut down on water use and turn waste into a fertilizer. The transition will cost \$30 million to \$40 million and could be done by the end

of the year or early next year.

"We're going to try to produce over 50 million gallons (of advanced ethanol) per year," said Curt Sheldon, the plant's chief accounting officer. "At today's prices, we could probably pay for the project in two to three years."

Western Plains plans to buy 17 ½ million bushels of grain sorghum a year from area farmers, and if more biofuel plants begin using sorghum, it has the potential to create a new and much bigger market for those growing the grain.

"Western Plains will be the first, but from our discussion with ethanol plants they won't be the last," said Cogburn, whose group helped push the EPA to recognize grain sorghum as a base for advanced biofuel. The effort also had support from the National Farmers Union.

No groups have stepped forward in opposition to approval.

Western Plains' switch to sorghum had to do with more than just economics, Sheldon said. Most of the company's managers and board members are farmers.

"And farmers are the ultimate environmentalists," he said. "They have to live on the land, work the land, raise their kids out there. We want to do our part."

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