

### S.D. Nov. Unemployment Rate At 4.3 Percent

PIERRE (AP) — The federal Bureau of Labor Statistics says South Dakota's preliminary unemployment rate for November was 4.3 percent, down from 4.5 percent the previous month and half the national average.

State Labor and Regulation Secretary Pam Roberts says the number of employed people in the South Dakota labor force increased by 6,200 over the year, continuing a trend that began in July 2010.

The national unemployment rate last month was 8.6 percent, down from 9 percent in October.

### Sioux Falls Airport Plans Weekend Closures

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — The Sioux Falls Regional Airport will shut down for repairs over several weekends this summer, causing all commercial flights in and out of the airport to be canceled in four-day chunks.

A more than 30-year-old section of runway has become a safety concern, KSFY-TV reported. The section intersects the airport's two runways, making it impossible to keep commercial flights going during the repairs.

"We certainly have looked at all the options and there really isn't a good option," said Dan Letellier, the airport's executive director, said. "Hopefully this is the least disruptive for people in the area to fly out of Sioux Falls."

The canceled weekends are: Aug. 17-Aug. 20; Aug. 24-Aug. 27; Sept. 7-Sept. 10, and Sept. 14-Sept. 17.

Airport officials told KSFY that the situation is rare. General aviation and air ambulances won't be affected because they don't need as much runway.

### Another Sioux Falls Casino Robbed At Gunpoint

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — Sioux Falls police are investigating a casino robbery.

Authorities say a man wielding a handgun walked into the Fire-side around 10:30 a.m. Thursday, demanded money and fled on foot. No one was hurt.

The man left with an unknown amount of cash.

### S.D. Experiencing One Of Driest Falls On Record

MITCHELL (AP) — After a year of flooding in much of the state, South Dakota has experienced one of the driest falls on record.

National Weather Service hydrologist Mike Gillispie tells *The Daily Republic* newspaper that Sioux Falls has seen the driest fall since record-keeping began in 1893. Less than an inch of precipitation fell in the state's largest city during September, October and November. The previous record-low precipitation was just over an inch in 1952. The average is 5 1/2 inches.

Gillispie says other parts of the state also have experienced their driest or near-driest autumns on record. He says the storm track has consistently gone south of the state.

### Home Invasion Report Leads To Couple's Arrest

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — A Sioux Falls couple who reported a home invasion face half a dozen drug charges.

Authorities say two men entered the home shortly before 7 p.m. Wednesday, demanding money, and one of them brandished a handgun. Police say the husband and wife and their two children in the home were not injured.

Officers who responded to the call say they found methamphetamine, marijuana and drug paraphernalia in the home.

The children, ages 6 and 11, have been taken into protective custody.

The two men who reportedly entered the home had fled the scene before officers arrived.

### Man Allegedly Chokes Woman Over Loud Music

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A Lincoln man has been arrested for allegedly choking a woman because her music was too loud.

Police told the *Lincoln Journal Star* that 22-year-old Phillip May was upset because his roommate's girlfriend would not turn down the music she was listening to with earphones early Thursday.

Officer Katie Flood says May put his hands on her throat, temporarily restricting her breathing. The woman was not seriously injured.

### OBITUARIES

#### Gladys Merkwan

Gladys Merkwan, age 89, of Yankton died at Avera Sacred Heart Hospital in Yankton from injuries sustained in a house fire on Tuesday, December 13, 2011.

Funeral services will be 10:30 a.m. Saturday, December 17, 2011, at the Opsahl-Kostel Funeral Chapel, Yankton, with Rev. Paul Opsahl and Rev. Dan Freng officiating. Burial will be in the Garden of Memories, Yankton, SD.

Visitations will be 5 to 8 p.m. Friday, at the Opsahl-Kostel Funeral Home & Crematory, Yankton, with a 7:00 PM Scripture service and then one hour prior to the service at the funeral chapel.

Pallbearers will be Jim, Joe, Mike, Gary, John, and Michael Merkwan. Honorary pallbearers will be her grandchildren, great grandchildren, and great great grandchildren.

Gladys was born on December 22, 1921, in Utica, SD, to Stanley and Emma Srb. She grew up and attended school around the Utica area. On September



Merkwan

10, 1940, she married Daniel L. Merkwan, and to this union were born four sons: Daniel, Jr., David, Daryl, and Michael.

Gladys lived for her family. Nothing made her happier than to be surrounded by her loved ones. Family gatherings were a very special occasion for her and she cherished those times together. She was always available to her family and worried more about tending to their needs than her own.

She loved to garden, dance the polka, and bake Czech delicacies for her family and friends. Her kolaches became a family favorite. Gladys spent her time as a homemaker and caregiver for family members.

Gladys is survived by three sons: David, Daryl, Michael (Deb), all of Yankton; seven grandchildren: Susan (Bob) Glowcheski, John (Deborah) Merkwan, James (Sherry) Merk-

wan, Joel (Valerie) Merkwan, Bree Merkwan, Brook Merkwan, and Michael Merkwan; ten great-grandchildren: Cassandra Medricky, Kimberly Jonas, MiKayla Glowcheski, Grayson Merkwan, Benjamin Merkwan, Hannah Merkwan, Elijah Merkwan, Jacob Merkwan, Sarah Merwan, and Grace Merkwan; three step-great grandsons: Shane, Chris, and Mykel Glowcheski; one great great granddaughter, Peytyn Medricky, two great great grandsons, Bradyn Medricky and Kason Jonas, and one sister-in-law, Laura.

Preceding Gladys in death were her husband, Daniel L.; a son, Daniel, Jr.; daughter-in-law, Sherry; her parents, and two sisters, Della and Helen.

**Yankton Press & Dakotan**  
December 16, 2011

**PSAHL-KOSTEL**  
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www.opsahl-kostelfuneralhome.com

#### Alta Orth

SCOTLAND — Funeral services for Alta Orth, 97, of Scotland, South Dakota will be held at 10:30 a.m. on Monday, December 19 at United Church of Christ in Scotland. Rev. Ron Shifley will be officiating. Interment will be in Garden of Memories in Yankton at 1:00 p.m. on Monday.

Visitation will be held on Sunday from 3:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m., at the Goglin Funeral Home in Scotland, with a prayer service at 6:00 p.m.

Alta passed away on Wednesday, December 14, 2011 at the

Good Samaritan Society of Scotland.

Online condolences may be sent and service information may be viewed at [www.goglinfh.com](http://www.goglinfh.com).

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#### Edna Moysis

AVON — Edna Moysis, 79, of Avon, died Thursday, Dec. 15, 2011, at the Good Samaritan Society, Wagner.

Funeral services are at 10:30 a.m. Monday at Trinity Presbyterian Church, Avon. Burial is in the church cemetery, rural Avon.

Visitation is 3-5 p.m. Sunday at the church in Avon, with the family present from 4-5 p.m.

Crosby-Jaeger Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.

#### Patricia Nielsen

BERESFORD — Patricia "Pat" Nielsen, 69, of Beresford died Thursday, Dec. 14, 2011.

A memorial service is at 1:30 p.m. Saturday at Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Beresford.

A visitation with family present is 5-7 p.m. Friday at Wass Funeral Home, Beresford.

Visit [www.wassfuneralhome.com](http://www.wassfuneralhome.com).

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YOUR NEWS! THE PRESS & DAKOTAN

# Gingrich Compares Self To Reagan

THOMAS BEAUMONT  
Associated Press

SIOUX CITY, Iowa — Likening himself to Ronald Reagan, Republican front-runner Newt Gingrich insisted in campaign debate Thursday night he can defeat President Barack Obama in 2012, adding it was laughable for his rivals to challenge his conservative credentials.

But challenge him they did, within seconds, when former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum recalled that as House speaker Gingrich had to contend with a "conservative revolution" from the ranks of Republican lawmakers.

Gingrich, Santorum and five other White House hopefuls met on a debate stage for the last time before Iowa's Jan. 3 caucuses kick off the selection of delegates to next summer's Republican National Convention.

That made the stakes high, and Gingrich and Santorum were not the only ones eager to impress the television audience with their grit and conservative beliefs.

"I hope I am the Tim Tebow of the Iowa caucuses," said Texas Gov. Tim Perry, referring to

the Denver Broncos quarterback whose passing ability draws ridicule but who has led his team to a remarkable seven wins in eight weeks.

"We're getting screwed as Americans," said former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman, insisting that he, in fact, was a steadier conservative than any of the others on stage.

"Anybody up here could beat Obama," said Rep. Ron Paul of Texas, whose views verge on libertarianism and who has struggled to expand his appeal.

Indeed, the big question in the opening moments of a fast-paced two-hour debate went to the heart of a dilemma that could eventually settle the race — do conservative Republican caucus and primary voters pick a candidate with their hearts, or do they look elsewhere if they judge their favored candidate might not be able to defeat the president.

Those voters begin making that choice on Jan. 3, and if experience is any guide, one or more of the presidential hopefuls on the debate stage will not make it out of the state to compete in the New Hampshire primary a week later.

Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney,

who runs second to Gingrich in the polls in Iowa, said his experience in private business made him the man to confront Obama in debates in the fall of 2012. "And I'll have credibility on the economy when he doesn't," he said.

Gingrich, who seemed an also-ran in the earliest stages of the race, has emerged as a leader heading into the final stretch of the pre-primary campaign. His decades in Washington and his post-congressional career as a consultant have been the subjects of tough critiques from Romney's campaign in the past week.

Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad, a Republican who has said he probably will not endorse a candidate before the caucuses, said Thursday that Gingrich needs to show he has discipline in the debate and in the next few weeks to convince GOP voters he has what it takes to be president.

"I don't know. I don't know," Branstad said in an Associated Press interview when asked specifically if he thought Gingrich had the discipline to be president. "I think he's a great idea person; I have a lot of respect for him. But whether he has the discipline and the focus, I don't know."

# Anonymous Donors Pay Off Layaway Accounts

BY MARGERY A. BECK  
Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — The young father stood in line at the Kmart layaway counter, wearing dirty clothes and worn-out boots. With him were three small children.

He asked to pay something on his bill because he knew he wouldn't be able to afford it all before Christmas. Then a mysterious woman stepped up to the counter.

"She told him, 'No, I'm paying for it,'" recalled Edna Deppe, assistant manager at the store in Indianapolis. "He just stood there and looked at her and then looked at me and asked if it was a joke. I told him it wasn't, and that she was going to pay for him. And he just busted out in tears."

At Kmart stores across the country, Santa seems to be getting some help: Anonymous donors are paying off strangers' layaway accounts, buying the Christmas gifts

other families couldn't afford, especially toys and children's clothes set aside by impoverished parents.

Before she left the store Tuesday evening, the Indianapolis woman in her mid-40s had paid the layaway orders for as many as 50 people. On the way out, she handed out \$50 bills and paid for two carts of toys for a woman in line at the cash register.

"She was doing it in the memory of her husband who had just died, and she said she wasn't going to be able to spend it and wanted to make people happy with it," Deppe said. The woman did not identify herself and only asked people to "remember Ben," an apparent reference to her husband.

Deppe, who said she's worked in retail for 40 years, had never seen anything like it.

"It was like an angel fell out of the sky and appeared in our store," she said.

Most of the donors have done their giving secretly.

Dona Bremser, an Omaha nurse, was at work when a Kmart employee called to tell her that someone had paid off the \$70 balance of her layaway account, which held nearly \$200 in toys for her 4-year-old son.

"I was speechless," Bremser said. "It made me believe in Christmas again."

Dozens of other customers have received similar calls in Nebraska, Michigan, Iowa, Indiana and Montana.

The benefactors generally ask to help families who are squirrel-away items for young children. They often pay a portion of the balance, usually all but a few dollars or cents so the layaway order stays in the store's system.

The phenomenon seems to have begun in Michigan before spreading, Kmart executives said.

"It is honestly being driven by

people wanting to do a good deed at this time of the year," said Salima Yala, Kmart's division vice president for layaway.

The good Samaritans seem to be visiting mainly Kmart stores, though a Wal-Mart spokesman said a few of his stores in Joplin, Mo., and Chicago have also seen some layaway accounts paid off.

Kmart representatives say they did nothing to investigate the secret Santas or spread word of the generosity. But it's happening as the company struggles to compete with chains such as Wal-Mart and Target.

Kmart may be the focus of layaway generosity, Yala said, because it is one of the few large discount stores that has offered layaway year-round for about four decades. Under the program, customers can make purchases but let the store hold onto their merchandise as they pay it off slowly over several weeks.

# EPA Says Omaha Lead Cleanup Hit Big Milestone

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The Environmental Protection Agency said Thursday that it has cleaned up lead contamination from 10,000 Omaha yards but still has about 4,100 more to do before completing the 13-year-old project.

EPA and Omaha officials held a news conference to celebrate the 10,000-yard milestone reached on Oct. 23. The effort that began in 1999 has cost about \$247.9 million so far, and EPA officials expect to spend about \$40-\$50 million more.

"The EPA has offered a brighter future to 40,000 of your neighbors who live in the Omaha lead site," Regional EPA Administrator Karl Brooks said.

Much of eastern Omaha has been considered a superfund site by the EPA because of the extent of lead contamination, which can endanger children's health, causing decreased intelligence, slow growth and behavior problems.

The EPA says the main source of lead contamination in Omaha was a lead smelter that Asarco

ran on the banks of the Missouri River for more than a century before it closed in 1997. The EPA also acknowledges that lead paint flaking off of buildings likely contributed to the problem.

In addition to replacing the soil in affected yards, the EPA has also done work to stabilize the paint on about 5,000 houses and established educational programs on the dangers of lead. Nearly 80 percent of the homes in the area were built before 1950, when lead paint was common.

# LAWMAKERS: Overhaul Neb. Child Welfare

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska needs to reclaim control over child welfare cases that are now handled by private contractors, place children's services under a new state department, and form a commission to figure out how to proceed with the current flawed system, lawmakers said Thursday.

A report by the Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee suggests creating a new state agency, the Department of Children's Services, to coordinate services for Nebraska children in state care. It also calls for the creation of a 25-member commission of local and state officials, lawmakers and child welfare stakeholders that will develop a plan to address other problems.

The committee ranked the three recommendations as top priorities in an 18-point report that seeks an overhaul of state services for children who suffer from abuse or neglect, as well as behavioral and mental health problems.

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