

## Christmas Eve Fire Destroys Fort Pierre Bar

FORT PIERRE (AP) — A state highway was temporarily closed from smoke that destroyed a Fort Pierre bar.

Authorities say a wood-burning stove is likely to have started the fire that gutted the Dudley's Valley Tap bar on Saturday.

No injuries were reported.

Fort Pierre assistant fire chief Rick Cronin tells KCCR-AM that the bar's two owners lived in the building. They were the only people there when the fire was reported shortly after 3 p.m. Saturday.

Part of U.S. Highway 14 was closed for several hours while firefighters battled the blaze. Thick black smoke made it almost impossible to see.

The bar's co-owner, Jill Pfeiffer, says the bar will be rebuilt. It had been in business for 51 years. Cronin says it's a total loss.

## South Dakota State Prison Inmate Dies

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — South Dakota investigators are looking into the death of an inmate at the state prison in Sioux Falls.

Dale Wickherst died Thursday. The 55-year-old Wickherst was serving a seven-year sentence for damaging property. The offense happened in Beadle County in east-central South Dakota.

South Dakota's Department of Corrections says an autopsy will be done to determine what caused Wickherst's death.

The state criminal investigation division will look into the incident. The corrections department says that's standard procedure when a prison inmate dies.

## Omaha Man Shot After Group Invades Home

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A 54-year-old Omaha man is hospitalized after a group of people forced their way into his home and shot him.

Omaha police were called to a south Omaha residence shortly after 10 p.m. Saturday. The victim, Fred Meredith, told authorities that six people knocked at the door and asked for a friend inside. Once the door was opened, the suspects came through, displayed a firearm and shot Meredith.

The suspects fled on foot. Meredith was taken to an Omaha hospital in serious condition. Police say his injury is not believed to be life-threatening.

Police searched the area for the suspects but couldn't find them.

## R.C. Church Surprises Shoppers With Gifts

RAPID CITY (AP) — A Rapid City church has been surprising shoppers at a store with presents.

The Saddle Mountain Church has been offering those in need a mix of gifts, including Christmas dinners, gift baskets, Christmas trees and gift cards.

Church member Taray Hall tells the *Rapid City Journal* that the Friday night event was the church's fifth annual effort to help those in need around Christmas time.

Laurie Lepel came to the Family Thrift store Friday night to buy a roast for Christmas dinner. It was only thing she could afford.

But she left with gifts that left her in tears.

Lepel walked away with a full Christmas dinner, given away by volunteers at the church, along with a gift bag and a decorative Christmas reindeer.

## Refuges Announce Neb., Iowa Deer Hunts

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — The Boyer Chute and DeSoto National Wildlife Refuges are holding a January muzzleloader deer hunt for Iowa and Nebraska hunters.

The hunt will run from Jan. 11 through Jan. 18, and will apply to antlerless deer only. Nebraska hunters need a Season Choice Area 21 permit for the hunt. Iowa hunters will need a January antlerless deer license, but they can use similar permits from Harrison or Pottawattamie counties.

Boyer Chute Refuge is open to Nebraska hunters only. DeSoto has land in both the states of Iowa and Nebraska, and hunters from both states may hunt.

## NEBRASKA

# Senate Hopefuls Veering Right

BY MARGERY A. BECK  
Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — The race for the Republican U.S. Senate nomination in Nebraska appears to be a scramble for which candidate can claim to be most conservative.

Candidates have claimed to be to the right of the National Rifle Association and to have backed tea party ideals before the tea party movement began, making it clear that those vying for the GOP nomination believe that the most conservative candidate has the best shot in the primary.

The winner could face incumbent Sen. Ben Nelson, among the most conservative Democrats in the Senate. He's expected to announce within days whether he'll seek re-election.

In the Republican race, Nebraska Treasurer and former state attorney general Don Stenberg set the conservative tone with the announcement of his candidacy in February.

"Nebraska's next United States senator needs to be a genuine, lifelong conservative," Stenberg said at the time.

The remark was an allusion to Attorney General Jon Bruning's law student days in the early 1990s, when he wrote school newspaper articles critical of the NRA and in favor of a woman's right to choose an abortion.

Since then, all of the Republican candidates — Stenberg, Bruning, state Sen. Deb Fischer and investment adviser Pat Flynn — have seemingly one-upped the other with a slew of conservative endorsements. There also have been repeated pledges to reject new or increased taxes, reduce government spending and fight abortion rights.



Stenberg

Fischer claims the endorsements of former GOP Gov. Kay Orr, one-time GOP Rep. John McCollister and several Republican state lawmakers. Bruning garnered the endorsement of the Tea Party Express and 2008 GOP presidential candidate Mike Huckabee. Stenberg countered with endorsements from ultraconservative U.S. Sens. Jim DeMint of South Carolina and Mike Lee of Utah, both favorites in the national tea party movement. And Flynn recently claimed he was "tea party before the tea party came along."

One of the more surprising comments came this fall from Bruning, who declared to a group of Republican students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln that the NRA is "to the left of me."

It's clear the statement is one Bruning's campaign would rather forget.

"I don't know that that's necessarily the best focus of him talking about his conservative record," said Trent Fellers, Bruning's campaign manager. "Jon led the lawsuit against Obamacare and formed the Medicaid Fraud Unit that has saved Nebraska taxpayers \$43 million. I think those are better representations of him talking about a conservative record."

But statements of extreme conservatism aren't necessarily a detriment to Republican primary candidates, said Mike Wagner, a political science professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

"I'm not sure that that's too far to the right of

Nebraska GOP primary voters," Wagner said of Bruning's NRA statement. "I think that so far, every time a candidate has made a prominent public declaration of a particularly conservative position, they've improved their position."

Wagner noted that Bruning was criticized last summer when he compared welfare recipients to raccoons, but he said Bruning also "raised quite a bit of money" from those who approved of the comment.

"Moderate voters don't show up to vote in primary elections, and so candidates have to appeal to the most extreme elements of their party to help them win a primary," Wagner said.

Stenberg said he's convinced that Nebraska voters want to know which candidate is most conservative.

"Looking across the country, we've seen Republicans run as conservatives, and then they get to Washington and their voting record doesn't match the conservative promises they made as candidates," Stenberg said. "I think it's very important that Nebraska's next U.S. senator be someone who is firmly committed to conservative principals and will vote that way once elected to the Senate."

Stenberg said many Nebraskans were disappointed in President George W. Bush and Republicans who controlled Congress from 2000 to 2006 because they allowed the national debt to grow, didn't stop illegal immigration and failed to develop domestic energy sources.

"Nebraska voters, like Republicans across much of the country, don't want to see that again," Stenberg said. "They want true conservatives who will not only promise to do those things, but will actually do them."

## South Dakota Setting Own Standards For Public Schools

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — South Dakota is drafting a new public school monitoring plan that would create a performance index to evaluate schools and seek improvements from falling in the bottom 15 percent.

A decade after a federal education law called "No Child Left Behind" set a goal of having every student in the nation be proficient in math and reading by 2014, the federal Education Department is instead allowing states to set their own academic achievement targets.

"We won't be interfering with the way they do business in their schools," said Melody Schopp, South Dakota's education secretary. "What we should be doing is focusing on those schools that need the most improvement."

The proposed system will evaluate schools based on students' test scores and attendance, teacher and administrator ratings, and the school's "learning climate." For high schools, their graduation rates would be included.

Each school would be expected to meet

its target each year, but only those that fall in the bottom 15 percent would be required to make major changes.

Schopp said South Dakota's plan could include three to four groups of schools with different goals.

Gregg Talcott, principal of Brandon Valley High School in Brandon told the Sioux Falls Argus Leader that local school boards will demand improvements even if state officials do not.

"Internally, you're going to deal with that," Talcott said. "Do we really need to put the amount of state dollars and intervention into those (higher-performing) schools?"

Natasha Ushomirsky, an analyst for The Education Trust, a Washington, D.C.-based organization that promotes student achievement, said South Dakota's system will not provide state scrutiny for most schools.

"By just focusing on the lowest of the low-performing schools, kids who are struggling in some of the other schools don't receive the attention they deserve," Ushomirsky said.

## Some Residents Are Upset With Deadwood Highway Project

DEADWOOD (AP) — Some Deadwood residents are upset about future plans to widen a stretch of U.S. Highway 85 from two lanes to three.

The *Black Hills Pioneer* reports that the 2013 Department of Transportation project will widen the stretch that winds from Cemetery Street in Deadwood to the intersection of Highway 385.

The South Dakota DOT recently notified property owners along the Highway 85 corridor who will likely be affected by the project.

The widening and addition of a center turn lane would remove all on-street parking.

Super 8 owner Ron Island says the project would likely cause him to lose all his parking at his Deadwood motel.

Mayor Francis Toscana says the city does not have an official position but wants to see if there's some sort of compromise.

## Lincoln Hopes New Surfacing Technique Adds Life To Streets

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Lincoln will be using a technique called microsurfacing on some streets next summer in hopes of prolonging their lifespans by another decade or so and saving money.

Workers will apply a coat of oil, rock aggregate and cement mixture to seal cracks and blemishes. The mixture helps prevent water from getting into cracks, freezing and then turning into potholes.

City engineer Thomas Shafer told the *Lincoln Journal Star* that it's like getting an oil change for your car.

"You take care of your good roads and keep them good so you're not paying for the costly repair later," he said.

Shafer said the process has been around for 15 or 20 years, and Lincoln tried it before on damaged roads and it didn't work like it should have.

"You can't take underlying bad pavement and try to fix it with this," Shafer said. "It lost favor among people."

But used correctly, he said, the mixture has been called a "fountain of youth" for roads.

The newspaper reported Thursday that Ballou Pavement Solutions of Salina, Kan., will be paid about \$852,000 for the work. Shafer said the city estimated the cost at \$673,000 but the higher bids were due to the specialty nature of the process.

The work won't take place until summer, but the agreement was approved by the City Council last month in order to get state aid, which will pay for 80 percent of the work.

The mixture costs \$2 a square yard, compared to \$12 a square yard that comes with milling and repaving the road, Shafer said. And, he said, it takes less time.

Shafer said some drivers will wonder why work is being done on good stretches of road.

"The point is to make it stay good at a cheap cost," he said.

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