

S.D. Receiving Fewer Heating Assistance Apps.

BY DIRK LAMMERS
Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS — South Dakota has received slightly fewer applications from residents seeking help to pay heating bills than it did last year, likely the result of tightened eligibility requirements and recent mild weather, officials said.

Eligibility for the federally funded Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program and the amount of help paying heat bills is based on household size and income, heat source and location in the state. The program makes payments directly to the utility company for natural gas, propane, electricity or fuel oil.

David Gall, LIHEAP program administrator for the South Dakota Department of Social Services, said cutbacks in federal funding over the past few years have left states trying to strike a balance between serving more households with smaller checks or fewer households with more assistance.

This year, South Dakota households with income up to 175 percent of the federal poverty level can qualify. The limit for a single-person household is \$19,548, and a family of four with an annual income of \$40,338 or less would qualify.

The state's level last year was 200 percent

of the poverty level.

Brandon Avila, spokesman for the Washington-based advocacy group Campaign for Home Energy Assistance, said the average one-time payment for families across the country is \$200 to \$300.

"So you're looking at just a bridge to get them over those couple tough months that they obviously face when it's either really hot or really cold," he said.

The state Department of Social Services had received 23,470 applications as of last week. At the same time last year, it had received 25,744 applications.

So far, South Dakota has received \$16.2 million in LIEAP funding for the fiscal year. It's projected the state will receive about \$17.5 million, the same amount that was allocated last year, according to the department.

Under LIHEAP, natural gas and electric bills are paid for meter readings between Oct. 1 and May 15. Fuel oil and propane costs are covered for deliveries between July 1 and April 30. Available money is provided on a first-come basis to applicants.

In South Dakota, seven Native American tribes administer their own LIEAP programs: Cheyenne River Sioux, Lower Brule Sioux, Oglala Sioux, Rosebud Sioux, Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate, Standing Rock Sioux and

Yankton Sioux.

Carol Muller, Minnehaha County's director of human services, said the county has an additional program to help residents with overdue utility bills, but it's open only to families at 100 percent of the poverty level and is considered a last resort.

Minnehaha has spent nearly \$136,000 so far this year on the assistance, which covers bills for heat, electric, water and sewer that are typically 60 or 90 days past due. It has about \$14,000 left in its budget for the year.

"You have to have disconnects before the county steps in," Muller said. "The county's considered to be last resort. We refer a tremendous number of people to the LIHEAP program."

Avila said the federal program that started in 1981 targets three major categories of vulnerable populations — the elderly, the disabled and households with children under 5.

Congress' commitment to the program has dropped from \$5.1 billion in the 2010 fiscal year to about \$3.5 billion this year.

"We can't reach every eligible household," he said. "Even at \$5.1 billion, which is the highest we've gotten, it still only served one in four households that are eligible. Once the funds run out, they run out."

Medical Marijuana Faces Tough Road In Minn.

BY AMY FORLITI
Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Supporters of medical marijuana face a tough road in Minnesota where Gov. Mark Dayton has said he won't sign anything relaxing the state's drug laws without the backing of law enforcement officials, who are showing no signs of budging.

"Our position is unchanged. We do not support the legalization of marijuana for any purpose," said Dennis Flaherty, executive director of the Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association. "It's illegal on the federal level and we're not going to support any legislation that would put us in conflict with ... federal law."

Proponents say they plan to push for legalized medical marijuana in 2013 anyway, arguing that medical decisions should be left to doctors rather than police. They say the public mood is shifting in their favor. Seventeen

states and the District of Columbia allow the use of marijuana for medical purposes, and Colorado and Washington recently legalized marijuana possession for adults with small amounts of the drug.

Tom Lehman, a lobbyist for the Marijuana Policy Project, said Minnesota's proposal would have safeguards, including patient photo identification.

"We want it very tightly controlled. We want it very tightly regulated. And we want easy access at the same time," Lehman said. "There are no secret agendas here."

But law enforcement isn't on board.

"As long as they oppose it, I just don't see any possibility that it will pass in Minnesota," said Charlie Weaver, former Department of Public Safety commissioner under Gov. Jesse Ventura and former chief of staff to Gov. Tim Pawlenty — who vetoed a medical marijuana bill in 2009, citing opposition from law enforcement.

Law enforcement leaders say marijuana is an addictive gateway drug that is associated with violent crime and can lead to use of other illicit drugs. They also say states that have legalized marijuana have enforcement problems. They point to California, where federal authorities are cracking down on dispensaries. Flaherty says anyone there can get a buyer's card for just about any reason.

At a recent forum with reporters, Senate Majority Leader Tom Bakk, who has previously supported decriminalizing medical marijuana, said there might be a way to mitigate law enforcement concerns. He did not elaborate.

Law enforcement leaders offered no suggestions when asked if there is any provision that might win their approval.

"How do you try to make something better that you just philosophically oppose?" said John Kingrey, executive director of the Minnesota County Attor-

ney's Association. He said all parties are open to discussing the issue, but there is nothing on the table.

Lehman said medical marijuana proponents need to work with law enforcement and will try to sit down with authorities soon.

Some states have good models, he said. In New Mexico, the state oversees production and distribution of marijuana, a medical advisory board determines what conditions qualify for its use, and doctors do not prescribe it. Instead, they certify that a patient has a qualifying condition and that standard treatment doesn't work.

He challenged authorities who don't like what they see in California or Colorado to use their expertise to help Minnesota come up with a way to "help us do it right."

"We'll see at the end of this year if they want to help patients or if they want to continue to stand in their way," Lehman said.

U. Iowa President Says She Wants To Accomplish More

BY RYAN J. FOLEY
Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa — University of Iowa President Sally Mason said Wednesday she hopes to lead the school for years and was moved to tears by a public show of support from student, faculty and staff leaders concerned that her job security is shaky amid criticism from the school's governing board and the governor.

Mason held a rare press conference to broadly defend her five-year tenure at the university and downplay the Iowa Board of Regents' decision not to extend her employment contract when it expired in August. Mason said she was not concerned about the move, noting that the board last year approved deferred compensation benefits that run through 2016 and awarded her a 2 percent raise this year.

Those actions, she said, are indications that her standing with the board is fine.

Mason, 62, said she wanted to finish the university's \$1.5 billion fundraising campaign. She noted she and her team have raised nearly \$1 billion in her tenure, and much of the rebuilding of its flood-damaged music and arts buildings came during her presidency. She noted that she came to Iowa in 2007 with the intention of finishing her career there.

Mason said she was touched by a statement issued by the presidents of the Faculty Senate,

Staff Council, and student governments representing undergraduate and graduate students that praised her leadership and noted several key achievements.

"It brought tears to my eyes to see their very kind words," she said.

The statement said the university had made "outstanding accomplishments" under Mason to improve student retention, recover from a historic 2008 flood and minimize the impact of state funding cuts. The campus leaders praised Mason's "determined and skillful leadership" in the face of adversity.

Michael Appel, president of the Executive Council of Graduate and Professional Students, which represents about 10,000 students, said the leaders felt it was time to speak up on Mason's behalf. He said regents should not make any decisions about Mason's future without consulting campus leaders.

"I would implore them to come to the University of Iowa talk to the faculty, students and staff about President Mason and they would realize that she really does have a pretty substantial base of support here," he said.

The statement came after leader of the regents and Gov. Terry Branstad have issued



criticism of Mason and the university in recent days, and campus controversies have kept her on the defensive.

Branstad is concerned about "a lack of transparency" and disconcerting events that have happened on Mason's watch, his spokesman Tim Abrecht said Wednesday. The governor will leave it up to the regents to decide whether to keep Mason, he said.

Mason said she would work harder "to make sure the governor has the information he needs." But she said she would continue following legal advice that the university not release student records and employee disciplinary and personnel files. Making those records public, she said, would jeopardize privacy and open the university up to costly lawsuits.

The Board of Regents last week revealed that it had directed her to reframe her priorities to focus more on improving the university's public image and relationship with lawmakers. She said she would work hard to do so, and that "I have some work to do" if some lawmakers see her as arrogant.

Mason is managing fallout from last month's resignation of

athletics department counselor Peter Gray, who is accused of sexually harassing athletes for years. She has apologized for lapses in the case and ordered an audit and other reviews to look for ways to improve procedures. But the university has refused to release investigation documents and Gray's resignation letter, saying they can be withheld under Iowa law.

Board President Craig Lang said last week the university failed to implement reforms ordered by regents in 2008 to improve the university's response to sexual misconduct. Mason said it was premature to make that assessment until the audit is complete.

The dean of the College of Education, Margaret Crocco, resigned Monday after she and other administrators had clashed with senior faculty members in the college. A faculty advisory committee resigned in protest last week after Mason's no. 2, Provost P. Barry Butler, directed the committee chairman to delete electronic copies of a workplace survey that had critical comments of Crocco.

Butler and the university administration had determined those records should be confidential and part of Crocco's personnel file. Mason said she believed Butler handled that situation appropriately.

S. Dakota Detox Center Death Ruled Suicide

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — The Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office says the death of a woman who was a patient at the county's detoxification center has been ruled a suicide.

The 48-year-old woman was found unresponsive at the detox center last month shortly after being admitted. The woman's name has not been released.

The Sheriff's Office says in a news release that a toxic level of rubbing alcohol was found in the woman's blood and the manner of death was ruled a suicide.

As standard procedure, the case will be forwarded to the Minnehaha County State's Attorney's Office for review.

The incident came weeks after the facility was temporary closed to new patients because of a state investigation into safety issues.

State Patrol: DNA Testing Planned On Skull

LYONS, Neb. (AP) — The Nebraska State Patrol says DNA testing is planned to try to determine whether a human skull found in northeast Nebraska is that of a woman missing since 1995.

The patrol says the skull was uncovered in early November by a contractor digging on land near Lyons. A forensic examination determined the skull was that of a middle-aged woman.

The Nebraska State Patrol is now gathering DNA evidence from the 1995 disappearance of 48-year-old Wanda Krumwiede for additional forensic examination and testing. Krumwiede, of Lyons, disappeared shortly after filing for divorce to end her 25-year marriage to Wilhelm Krumwiede.

Wilhelm Krumwiede was charged with her murder, but was twice acquitted of the crime. He died in 2003 at the age of 66.

Former BPI Employee Sues ABC News, Oliver

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — A former worker at a South Dakota beef processor who was laid off amid decreased sales of lean, finely textured beef is suing ABC News, celebrity chef Jamie Oliver and a food blogger over use of the term "pink slime."

Bruce Smith was one of about 750 people who lost their jobs at Beef Products Inc. after the company took a financial hit following social media and news reports about the product.

Smith is seeking \$70,000 in damages in the civil suit.

BPI earlier sued ABC News for \$1.2 billion for defamation. That lawsuit it still pending.

Representatives for ABC News and Oliver did not immediately respond to a message seeking comment. Food blogger Bettina Siegel says she believes she is protected by the First Amendment.

Neb. Preparing For Republican River Shortage

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska officials are preparing for a likely water shortage next year that would require extra conservation along the Republican River.

Nebraska Department of Natural Resources deputy director Jim Schneider said Wednesday that his agency is in talks with Kansas and Colorado on ways to comply with the Republican River Compact. The water-sharing agreement among the states dates to 1943.

A preliminary state forecast shows Nebraska's natural resources districts might need to make up 20,000 acre-feet of water next year to stay in compliance.

Schneider says the districts have until Jan. 31 to share their plans for conserving water. He says districts are moving forward with augmentation plans that would draw water from more abundant groundwater sources. Otherwise, they might have to buy water from reservoirs or restrict usage.

'Field of Dreams' Development Foes Lose Again

DUBUQUE, Iowa (AP) — A Dubuque County judge has again refused to block a zoning change needed for commercial use of the "Field of Dreams" movie site.

The Dubuque Telegraph Herald reports that Judge Thomas Bitter on Monday denied a motion by a group called Residential and Agricultural Advisory Committee. The group is composed of area residents and other people who own land near the Dyersville property.

The group wants the court to overturn a rezoning decision by the Dyersville City Council. The group maintains the council violated open-meetings laws and also didn't consider potential harm posed by the development.



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Regents Approve 2 Physics Doctoral Programs

SPEARFISH, S.D. (AP) — Two South Dakota universities are closer to adding doctoral programs in physics to their curriculums in part to support work being done at the Sanford Underground Research Facility at Lead (lead).

The state Board of Regents voted Wednesday to add the programs at the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology in Rapid City and the University of South Dakota in Vermillion.

The Legislature must now approve \$1.9 million in funding for the programs.

If approved, both universities would add four physics faculty members and six graduate assistants.

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