



'Acoustic Christmas' Returns To Yankton • 1B

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Rice Bows Out Of Running

Sen. Kerry Likely Choice For Secretary Of State

BY BEN FELLER AND JULIE PACE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Susan Rice, the embattled U.N. ambassador, abruptly withdrew from consideration to be the next secretary of state on Thursday after a bitter, weeklong standoff with Republican senators who declared they would fight to defeat her nomination.

The reluctant announcement makes Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry the likely choice to be the nation's next top diplomat when Hillary Rodham Clinton departs soon. Rice withdrew when it became clear her political

troubles were not going away, and support inside the White House for her potential nomination had been waning in recent days, administration officials said.

In another major part of the upcoming Cabinet shake-up for President Barack Obama's second term, former Republican Sen. Chuck Hagel of Nebraska now is seen as the front-runner to be defense secretary, with official word expected as soon as next week.

For the newly re-elected president, Rice's withdrawal was a sharp political setback and a sign of the difficult



Rice

ties Obama faces in a time of divided and divisive government. Already, he had been privately weighing whether picking Rice would cost him political capital he would need on later votes.

When Rice ended the embarrassment by stepping aside, Obama used the occasion to criticize Republicans who were adamantly opposed to her possible nomination.

"While I deeply regret the unfair and misleading attacks on Susan Rice in recent weeks, her decision demonstrates the strength of her character," he said.

"I am saddened we have reached this point," Rice said.

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Wes Wortmann and his wife, Julie, (in the background) of rural Wynot, Neb., listen to speakers during Thursday's workshop in Hartington, Neb., geared toward beginning farmers and ranchers. The Center for Rural Affairs sponsored the event, which also benefited producers and landowners seeking to sell their property.

New Farmers Find Funding, Land Solutions

Workshop Addresses Growing Gap Between Retiring, Incoming Farmers

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF
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HARTINGTON, Neb. — Wes Wortmann, Nate Gubbels and Jake Dendinger live in different parts of Cedar County, Neb., but they share a common concern.

They are all young farmers trying to find ways to start or expand an operation.

They are also part of a rapidly shrinking minority, as Nebraska's farm population becomes increasingly gray.

The trio of young producers were the target audience of Thursday's workshop for beginning farmers and ranchers, sponsored by the Center for Rural Affairs (CFRA) at the Hartington library. But the workshop also addressed audience members seeking ways of passing along their operations.

Nebraska faces a crisis in terms of finding its next generation of farmers, said Virginia Meyer with the CFRA office in Lyons, Neb.

"One-fourth of Nebraska's farmers are 65 or older," she said. "Fifty-six is the average age of farmers in

Nebraska, and that number has increased by 3 1/2 during the last five years."

It's not just a man's issue, as women — many of them widows — own one-third of Nebraska's farmland, according to the CFRA.

Nebraska isn't alone in facing the widening age gap for farmers, Meyer said.

"Seventy percent of the U.S. ag land will change hands over the next 20 years," she said.

Farmers and ranchers under the age 35 are fast becoming "endangered species" in Nebraska, the CFRA says.

According to the National Census of Agriculture, Nebraska had 13,436 operators under the age of 35 in 1982. The figure shrunk to 3,353 by 2007.

At the other end of the age spectrum, the number of Nebraska operators age 65 and older soared from 8,777 in 1982 to 13,062 a quarter-century later.

Nebraska has only 25 percent as many operators under 35 years of

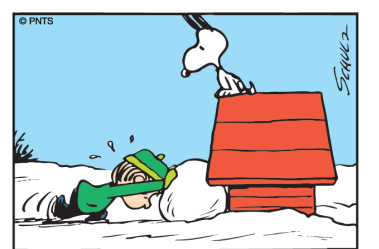
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INSIDE TODAY



USA Weekend

HAPPY HOLIDAYS



The holidays are 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration.

Dec. 14
11 shopping days to Christmas

* * *

Obama, Boehner Meet On 'Fiscal Cliff'

BY ANDREW TAYLOR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — With time growing short and no "fiscal cliff" progress evident, President Barack Obama and Republican House Speaker John Boehner met for face-to-face negotiations late Thursday at the White House.

The meeting came shortly after Boehner publicly accused Obama of dragging out negotiations on a federal tax-and-spending agreement that would avoid an economy-threatening series of wide-ranging tax increases and spending cuts that could come in less than three weeks. Other Republicans said such a tactic seemed to be working in making it more likely a deal would include higher tax rates for the wealthy.

As the meeting started, the two sides appeared far apart on the issues, and Boehner was scheduled to return home to Ohio on Friday.

An impasse between Obama and Boehner, R-Ohio, over the president's demand for higher tax rates on household income over \$250,000 continues to be a main obstacle in negotiations to avoid broad tax increases and spending cuts that will be triggered automatically on Jan. 1. Boehner says the president refuses to offer spending cuts to popular benefit programs like Medicare whose costs are rapidly rising.

"Unfortunately, the White House is so unserious about cutting spending that it appears willing to slow-walk any agreement and walk our economy right up to the fiscal cliff," Boehner told reporters Thursday.

But there's increasing resignation within the GOP that Obama is going to prevail on the rate issue since the alternative is to allow taxes on all workers to go way up when Bush-era tax cuts expire on Dec. 31.

CLIFF | PAGE 11A

Yankton's Annual Christmas Bird Count Takes Flight Sunday

BY NATHAN JOHNSON
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For some people in the Yankton area, this weekend is for the birds.

Approximately 25 birders and nature enthusiasts will take part Sunday in the National Audubon Society's (NAS) annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) for Yankton. They will join tens of thousands of volunteers across the Americas conducting more than 2,200 bird counts between today (Friday) and Jan. 5.

Roger Dietrich organizes the Yankton count and has been scouting locations and birds.

On Sunday, volunteers will count and record each individual bird and bird species they encounter within a 15-mile diameter circle. Last year, 30 people observed a total of 71 bird species on

the Yankton count day, with an additional five species noted during the count week period.

This will be a unique year, Dietrich predicts.

"Unless the weather changes drastically, we're going to have a lot of open water on Lewis and Clark Lake," he stated, adding he doesn't remember a CBC when the lake was completely ice-free. "Most of the time, it's frozen except for a little bit by the dam. We should have a few more birds around than usual if it stays like this. There were thousands and thousands of snow geese, common mergansers and mallards on the lake (Thursday morning)."

Dietrich said he has already spotted some fairly unusual birds such as the Pacific loon, the long-tail duck and the white-winged scoter.

"For some reason this year, there have been a lot of loons and scoters around," he stated. "I'm hoping one of the rarer ones like that will be around this weekend."

The results of the CBC will be compiled into the NAS database, which represents more than a century of unbroken data on trends of early-winter bird populations across the Americas.

According to the NAS, the 2011 CBC showed the impact climate change is having on birds.

It also revealed a decline in common birds, including the Northern Bobwhite quail.

Dietrich said the effects of climate change are evident to him when he looks at the local bird population.

"I think any birder sees there

BIRDS | PAGE 11A

CAROLING, CAROLING



KELLY HERTZ/P&D

Yankton High School choir members serenade the crowd during Thursday night's YHS chorus and orchestra concert at the YHS/Summit Activities Center theatre. Various vocal ensembles and the orchestra performed songs of the season, with the orchestra and choral members combining to perform the allegro from "Gloria." To see or purchase images from this event, visit spotted.yankton.net.

