

Officials May Consider Reducing Early Voting

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska's secretary of state says he may consider supporting a reduction in the period for in-person early voting.

Secretary of State John Gale says his office received findings Monday related to a voting complaint that included a recommendation to reduce in-person early voting from 35 days to 25 days.

A Lincoln attorney appointed by Gale to oversee a hearing on the voting case made the recommendation. The voting complaint filed in October involves a visually impaired woman who was unable to vote in October because equipment wasn't ready.

Supporters say reducing the days will give election officials more time to finalize ballots and special voting equipment before early voting begins in October.

Gale says his office will explore "a remedy through the Legislature" during the upcoming session.

Cheese Company Settles Discrimination Charge

MILBANK (AP) — A South Dakota cheese making company has agreed to pay \$85,000 to settle a sex discrimination charge.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission says Milbank-based Valley Queen Cheese Factory has agreed to pay the settlement to two female applicants rejected for the position of milk hauler.

The EEOC says the company refused to hire the women for the milk hauler positions and had a history of staffing the position exclusively with men.

In addition to the settlement, the company agreed to provide anti-discrimination training to all employees and expand its recruiting.

Valley Queen Cheese Factory denies that it discriminated against women. The company says rather than fight through litigation, it decided it was best to settle the charges.

Governor's Event To Focus On Animal Welfare

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — The governor's annual agriculture conference will focus on the effects of animal welfare laws that other states have passed.

Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman announced the lineup for the February conference on Monday.

Heineman says there has been a lot of discussion in Nebraska and other states about livestock production practices.

So several sessions at the conference will look at how animal welfare laws in other states have affected the agriculture industry.

The agriculture conference will also look at how farmers and ranchers can cope with extended drought. Heineman says if the drought continues into next year there could be tension between water users in the state.

The conference will be held in Kearney on Feb. 12-13. Full details about the event are available online at <http://www.agr.ne.gov>.

Man Pleads Guilty In Shootout With Officers

RAPID CITY (AP) — A Wyoming man accused of shooting at law officers after a vehicle chase in western South Dakota has pleaded guilty to lesser charges.

Forty-two-year-old James Baker of Gillette, Wyo., had faced an attempted murder charge after the Jan. 10 shootout with officers in the Rapid City area. He pleaded guilty on Friday to aggravated assault on a public officer and committing a felony with a firearm, in a deal with prosecutors who will recommend a prison term of 70 years.

Baker's attorney said his client was trying to commit suicide and regretted the incident. He is to be sentenced Jan. 4.

No officers were hit in the shootout but Baker was wounded and hospitalized.

No Injuries As Helicopter Strikes Hangar

WINNER (AP) — A South Dakota Army National Guard helicopter has been damaged after striking an airport hangar in Winner.

KBFS radio reports that the UH-60 Black Hawk's main rotor system struck an airport hangar while taxiing about 4:20 p.m. Sunday.

The aircraft sustained damage to its rotor and fuselage but there were no injuries.

A four-man crew and one passenger were aboard the aircraft at the time. The crew was returning to Rapid City from Brookings after a routine training mission and had stopped in Winner to refuel.

The helicopter and its crew are based out of the Army Aviation Support Facility in Rapid City.

The Winner Police Department and local emergency management personnel responded to the scene. The incident is under investigation.

OBITUARIES

JoAnn Vesely

JoAnn Marie Vesely, age 68, of Denver, CO, formerly of Tabor, SD passed away on Wednesday, December 12, 2012 at her residence.

Private family memorial services are pending. Burial of JoAnn's cremated remains will be in the St. Wenceslaus Cemetery.

Opsahl-Kostel Memorial Chapel, Tabor is in charge of arrangements.

JoAnn Marie Vesely was born on May 19, 1944 to Arthur and Florence (Hale) Vesely in Yankton, SD. She graduated from Tabor High School in 1962 and sometime later moved to Denver, CO and resided there

until the time of her death.

She is survived by her mother, Florence Vesely of Tabor, SD; brother, Dennis Vesely of Tabor, SD; sister, Jeani (Steve) Zavadil of Fordyce, NE; three nieces, one nephew, and one great niece.

She was preceded in death by her father, Arthur, her brother, Donald, and her grandparents.

Yankton Press & Dakotan
December 18, 2012

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Remains Of 2 Fetuses Found In Eastern S.D.

BY DIRK LAMMERS
Associated Press

SIoux FALLS — Authorities have discovered the remains of two fetuses in eastern South Dakota and are investigating the case as a homicide, South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley said Monday.

The "severely decomposed tissue and bones" were found in a rural shelterbelt on private land in Deuel County on Nov. 2, Jackley said.

Experts have concluded that the fetuses were about 40 weeks old and capable of living

outside the uterus, Jackley added, but he declined to say whether it appeared the deaths occurred before or after delivery.

"There was a cooler with decomposed tissue and bones and then further remains were recovered in the area of the cooler," he told The Associated Press.

Jackley could not say whether they were twins, noting only that there was a "second fetus of similar age."

The state Division of Criminal Investigation and the Deuel County Sheriff's Office are working the case. Investigators have been gathering additional information from an au-

opsy report and a forensic anthropological evaluation.

"There's further review and testing going on, including DNA," Jackley said.

Authorities are now asking the public for information that might aid the case.

Investigators would like to talk to anybody with information about someone who was pregnant and now is no longer pregnant and doesn't have any children. They're also seeking help from doctors, nurses or physician's assistants who may have seen a patient pre- or post-pregnancy or might have prescribed medicine, Jackley said.

Neb. Governor Calls School Shooting Evil Tragedy

BY JOSH FUNK
Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman said last week's shooting at a Connecticut elementary school was an "evil tragedy," but the response should include more than just gun control.

Heineman said it's hard to understand why anyone would shoot and kill elementary school students, but preventing mass shootings is a complicated problem.

"This has been an evil tragedy. Why would anyone do this?" Heineman said.

The Republican governor said it's important to gather all the facts about Friday's shooting in Newtown, Conn. — which killed 20 children and six adults — before deciding how to respond.

Heineman said any response should examine issues related to family structure, mental health care, the justice system, society's values and television violence as well as gun control.

"There are a lot of issues," Heineman said. "This is complex and complicated and we need to be careful in that regard."

Heineman has experience dealing the aftermath of mass shootings.

Five years ago this month, 19-year-old Robert Hawkins opened fire inside Omaha's Westroads Mall. Hawkins killed eight people and wounded five before killing

himself inside the Von Maur department store on Dec. 5, 2007.

And in 2011, 17-year-old Robert Butler Jr. fatally wounded Assistant Principal Vicki Kaspar and injured Principal Curtis Case at Millard South High School in Omaha. Butler fled the school and then shot and killed himself.

Heineman repeatedly used words like unthinkable and incomprehensible to describe the shooting in Connecticut. Just a few days before the shooting, Heineman read to a group of first-graders at an elementary school in Omaha, which he said made the deaths in Connecticut seem even more tragic.

"It's inconceivable to me and would be unbelievable to think that those kids would be dead today," he said.

Heineman, whose wife is a former elementary school principal, said his family talked a lot about the shooting over the weekend.

The governor said he thinks the Connecticut elementary school had done more than most schools to improve security.

He said it makes sense to review school policies, but he's not sure what else could have been done because the gunman, 20-year-old Adam Lanza, forced his way in.

"We need to recognize while we're trying to all we can to prevent future incidences like this that someone who's determined is very hard to stop," he said.

Lincoln Readies For 2nd Year Of Water Restrictions

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — The capital city of Lincoln is preparing for another year of drought and the possibility of renewed mandatory water restrictions on residents.

Earlier this year, record drought led Lincoln officials to invoke mandatory water restrictions for most of August into September. Lincoln homeowners could face mandatory water restrictions even earlier, beginning as soon as spring or early summer, the *Lincoln Journal Star* reported Monday.

There is a 14-inch precipitation deficit in eastern Nebraska, state climatologist Al Dutcher said.

It would take six to seven times the normal precipitation — or more than 100 inches of snow — over the next three months to catch up on that deficit and refill underground water sources used by Lincoln, Dutcher said.

"It's almost a given that the city will have to revisit mandatory restrictions next summer," he said.

Some have concerns about the effect crop irrigation will have on groundwater levels and drinking water supplies in the region.

"We are not in good shape," said Jerry Obrist, chief engineer of the city's water system. "This is the sixth-worst year (historically)."

The other five came in 1890, 1894, 1895, 1934 and 1936 — all before modern irrigation was developed.

If drought is particularly bad, city water could be limited to essential needs — meaning minimum use inside homes and for edible gardens, as well as the needs of businesses the community depends on, Obrist said.

Outdoor water use could be severely restricted, allowing just enough water a week to keep plants alive, but not blooming.

Meanwhile, city staff are updating the city's water management plan and taking a look at the penalties for violating mandatory watering restrictions. Those changes likely will go to the City Council in February.

This summer, 400 tickets were issued to Lincoln homeowners, renters and businesses for violating the city's mandatory water restrictions, which required residents to follow a designated schedule for outdoor watering and washing cars.

Rock Blasting Set On Drought-Plagued Mississippi River

BY JIM SUHR AND JIM SALTER
Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Barge operators along a key stretch of the Mississippi River braced Monday for months of restricted shipping as crews prepared to begin blasting large rock formations that are impeding navigation on the drought-plagued waterway.

Contractors from Iowa and Ohio could begin drilling holes into the troublesome Mississippi River bedrock south of St. Louis and detonating explosives inserted inside as early as Tuesday, the Army Corps of Engineers said. They expect to remove enough rock to fill about 50 dump trucks, possibly more.

The demolition of the massive formations near Thebes, Ill., coincides with an unusual move by the agency to release water from a southern Illinois lake, adding a few inches of depth to a river that is getting lower by the day — largely because of the lingering effects of the nation's worst drought in decades.

The corps said a six-mile stretch of the river will be closed to shipping starting Tuesday from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. to allow for the safe use of the explosives. Barges seeking passage will have to line up and wait for an eight-hour window when that stretch will be open, with the Coast Guard essentially acting as a flagman, letting barges through in one direction, then the other.

The project was initially to have begun in February but was expedited at the behest of U.S. lawmakers from Mississippi River states. Mike Petersen, a corps spokesman

in St. Louis, said the agency was confident it could complete the project by the end of March.

The rock being removed typically would be beneath sand on the river bottom but has been exposed by the corps' dredging efforts to keep the channel open.

On Saturday, the corps began releasing water from Carlyle Lake into the Mississippi, saying the additional water will provide 6 inches of depth by Christmas Eve, enabling barge traffic to safely pass the rock formations. Gen. John Peabody, the corps' Mississippi Valley Division commander, said the "inches make a difference."

Months of drought have left water levels up to 20 feet below normal along a 180-mile stretch of the river from St. Louis to Cairo, Ill., fanning concerns among barge operators that river use soon may be dramatically restricted, if it is not completely shut down. The problem worsened last month when the corps cut the outflow from an upper Missouri River dam by two-thirds, meaning far less water from the Missouri River flows into the Mississippi.

River industry trade group said the rock pinnacle removal and extra water from Carlyle Lake aren't enough.

"The release of a modest amount of water from Missouri

River reservoirs during the time this rock pinnacle work occurs remains essential to allowing the continued movement of our nation's basic commodities, especially during this critical export season," said Michael J. Toohey, president and CEO of Waterways Council Inc.

Barges on the Mississippi already are carrying lighter and more frequent loads, and some operators say they'll halt shipping if they face more restrictions. Trade groups say a prolonged stoppage of shipping on the Mississippi could have an economic impact reaching into billions of dollars, with the movement of agricultural products, coal, petroleum and other goods reliant on the river for transport.

That possible fallout hasn't been lost on members of Illinois' congressional delegation, led by U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin. On Monday, the Democrat gathered representatives of potentially affected industries for a private meeting at which the Army Corps underlined its efforts to keep the river open, including hustling in a second dredging machine last week to help clear channel-clogging sediment.

"The Mississippi River is the cog that turns the wheel for many industries in Illinois," Durbin said after the summit in East Alton, northeast of St. Louis. "From farms to coal mines, a great deal of Illinois' economy depends on the Mississippi."

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