

Lawmaker: ALEC Peddling Bills In Neb.

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A state lawmaker who quit the American Legislative Exchange Council says the conservative group is pushing cookie-cutter bills in Nebraska. State Sen. Danielle Conrad of Lincoln said Wednesday that the national group hasn't gained much traction. But Conrad, a Democrat, says she has seen a number of measures written by ALEC and introduced by Republican lawmakers in the officially nonpartisan Legislature. Most of the bills have died in committee, including a voter identification measure. The group Bold Nebraska says ALEC also advocated for the Keystone XL pipeline, which some Nebraska landowners oppose. ALEC describes itself as a free-market, small-government think tank that works with state lawmakers. Conrad spoke about the group during a media conference call organized by Americans United for Change, a liberal advocacy group.

Bond Ordered For Accessory Suspects

SIoux FALLS (AP) — A judge has ordered \$250,000 bond for two 20-year-old Dell Rapids men accused of helping to plan a robbery that left a Sioux Falls man dead. Kevin James Rice and Douglas Peter Scholten are charged with being accessories to robbery, burglary and aggravated assault. Police spokesman Sam Clemens says the two were not in the home at the time of the killing. Two Watertown teens, Brian David Anderson and Trevor Kruthoff, face the same charges as well as first-degree murder and attempted first-degree murder in the death of 20-year-old Jordan LeBeau. Authorities say his 48-year-old father was shot and wounded when he tried to help his son. Anderson and Kruthoff are scheduled to appear in court Thursday. Court papers say the goal was to steal \$100,000 from the murder victim.

Idle Nuke Plant Ready To Restart

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The Nebraska utility that owns a nuclear power plant that has been idle since April 2011 says the troubled plant is now ready to restart, but federal regulators will make the final decision. The Omaha Public Power District submitted a 139-page report to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission this week making the case that the Fort Calhoun plant is ready. An NRC spokeswoman says regulators are still reviewing the latest repairs. Lou Cortopassi manages the nuclear plant 20 miles north of Omaha that sits across the Missouri River from Iowa. He says OPPD addressed Fort Calhoun's problems, and it is ready to operate safely. Fort Calhoun initially shut down for routine maintenance, but significant flooding in 2011, a small fire and a series of safety violations forced it to remain closed.

Wis. Beef Company Bids For SD Plant

SIoux FALLS (AP) — A Green Bay, Wis.-based beef processing company has submitted the minimum \$12.75 million bid for an idled South Dakota plant. American Foods Group's bid for Northern Beef Packers allows it to become a qualified bidder in an auction scheduled for Thursday at the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Sioux Falls. Wednesday's bid is the first submitted for the upcoming auction. An investment banking firm working with Northern Beef, White Oak Global Advisors, is automatically deemed a qualified bidder. Northern Beef opened on a limited basis in 2012 after years of delays. Its owners filed for bankruptcy protection in July and laid off most employees because the company lacked money to buy cattle for slaughter. American Foods Group's website says the company ships more than 4 million pounds of beef a day.

Opera House Kicks Off Fundraiser

LEAD (AP) — The Homestake Opera House has kicked off a \$4.2 million capital campaign to renovate its stage. *The Black Hills Pioneer* reports that a \$50,000 anonymous donation pledging matching funds has kicked off the effort celebrating the opera house's 99th anniversary. Organizers hope to raise \$99,000 by the end of the year to start the renovation project with a goal of completion for an August 2015 grand reopening. Executive Director Sarah Carlson says the project will preserve a remarkable piece of architecture that is also a powerful economic engine for the city. She says the project is a rehabilitation, not a restoration. Carlson says she's reaching out to community groups, civic organizations, governmental bodies, corporate sponsors and the general audience.

Man Died Under Truck, Officials Say

DUNCAN, Neb. (AP) — A 55-year-old man has died while working on his truck at his home in eastern Nebraska. The Platte County Sheriff's Office says deputies were sent to the home in Duncan around 1:45 a.m. Wednesday. They found the man pinned under a pickup. He'd been working on the truck when it shifted out of gear and rolled, trapping him under the vehicle frame. The man was pronounced dead at the scene. The man's name isn't being released until relatives are notified about his death. The accident is being investigated.

Retirement Fund Might Join With SDRS

BY BOB MERCER
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — Trustees for the South Dakota Retirement System gave their endorsement Wednesday for the governor's plan to fix the state cement-plant retirement fund.

The vote was 12-2 in favor of the concept that Gov. Dennis Daugaard had outlined publicly for the first time on Tuesday in his budget speech to the Legislature.

Daugaard wants lawmakers to appropriate \$5.6 million to bring the cement-plant fund into fully funded status — 107 percent, to be exact — and merge it into the much larger SDRS pension fund.

SDRS covers state government, many cities, counties and school districts, many public safety organizations and various special districts.

State government sold the cement plant at Rapid City and its related operations in 2001 at the request of then-Gov. Bill Janklow.

But its pension fund fell behind financially and the benefits were negotiated under union contract, removing much of the flexibility on the spending side.

In 2010 the SDRS central office took over its administration and the Legislature so far has put \$2 million into its investment pool.

A third-party vendor handles day-to-day matters on a \$25,000 annual contract.

One of the SDRS trustees opposed to

the governor's proposed consolidation, teachers representative Bonnie Mehlbrech of Sioux Falls, asked why SDRS members should face potential financial liability for the cement-plan system's members.

"That whole sale of the cement plant, SDRS didn't have anything to do with it," she said.

Supreme Court Justice Steve Zinter of Pierre, a trustee representing judicial members, said he wants the plan to work but doesn't want SDRS members to bear "the drip, drip, drip" of financial effects.

Zinter recalled the plant's sale coming up for the SDRS trustees' discussion in 2001. "The board was very concerned about it. We were promised this day would never come," he said.

Rapid City Police Lt. James Johns, who represents public safety employees on the board, said the cement-plant fund represents "six-tenths of one percent" of the value of the SDRS investment portfolio.

"Sometimes the devil is in the details. Sometimes you have to do the right thing," Johns said.

Another trustee, David Merrill of Plankinton, who represents school board members, said the board should support "our countrymen."

"Sometimes we forget these people are our fellow South Dakotans," Merrill said. "We're getting all excited about this teeny, teeny, teeny percentage."

As of June 30, 2013, the cement-plant system had 239 retirees and beneficiaries, 26 active members and 77 inactive

members who were vested. SDRS by contrast has more than 400 participating units of government and more than 75,000 members, including 22,408 members who received a benefit in 2012.

"I don't see the real downside here," said trustee Eric Stroeder of Mobridge, a state Department of Transportation engineer who represents state government employees.

As the debate closed Zinter said he didn't feel as bad about it as when the discussion began. "Maybe this is much ado about nothing," he said. "It's a matter of principle versus math and practicality."

The plan needs the Legislature's approval. SDRS administrator Rob Wylie said the governor's top staff asked him to draft the legislation for review.

He said there will be a single bill that contains the funding and the merger language with an emergency clause for the law to take effect "as early as March 31."

Lt. Gov. Matt Michels of Yankton is a governor-appointed trustee. "We obviously want support in the (legislative) process," he told the board.

Trustee Jim Hansen of Pierre, who represents SDRS retirees, said it would be better if SDRS didn't take the lead. "I would certainly be more comfortable if it was a governor's bill," Hansen said. Michels said he understood.

The trustees also voted unanimously Wednesday to offer cement-plant members the opportunity to take lump-sum settlements and withdraw

Panel Recommends Keeping Place Names

BY CHET BROKAW
Associated Press

PIERRE (AP) — At the request of black leaders, the South Dakota panel responsible for getting rid of offensive geographic names decided Wednesday to seek changes to a state law that requires the renaming of places that use the word "Negro."

Current state law requires the South Dakota Board on Geographic Names to find new names for creeks, lakes, buttes and other geographic features that include the terms "squaw" and "Negro."

But black leaders said the term "Negro" is not offensive and should remain a part of place names to recognize black people's contributions to South Dakota history.

Kenny Anderson Jr., a black member of the Sioux Falls City Council, said he will urge state lawmakers to change the law so places can retain "Negro" as part of

their names.

"After speaking with other members of the community and everything, we thought that was the best way to keep those geographic locations named so that they tell a history, and that history is the history of African-Americans in this state," Anderson told The Associated Press in a telephone interview after the board decided to seek the change in law.

"I do not consider 'Negro' an offensive term. It's basically a term that was used to identify race," Anderson said.

The Board on Geographic Names voted unanimously Wednesday to ask the Legislature to change the law so the word "Negro" can be kept in place names. The term "squaw" would still be considered offensive.

The board suspended work in June to rename places that include the word after officials from the South

Dakota African American History Museum in Sioux Falls urged that the sites continue to include the word "Negro."

Museum curator Porter Williams said Wednesday he hopes the law is changed to allow the continued use of "Negro" in place names.

"We're not going to take the word 'Negro' out of our history," Williams said.

Board chairman J.R. LaPlante, state secretary of tribal relations and a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, said black leaders who appeared at a hearing in October were unanimous in supporting a move to keep the name.

"We heard from the people I think can really speak to it because it's their culture, it's their life experience. When they made their recommendation that they didn't consider 'Negro' offensive, we didn't receive any opposition to that," LaPlante said.

The 2001 Legislature passed a law to start

eliminating offensive names. The U.S. Board on Geographic Names, which has the final say, has since changed the names of 20 places in South Dakota. However, the federal board deferred action on some name changes, partly because it said the state had not sufficiently involved the public in renaming places.

Another state law passed in 2009 listed 15 names that hadn't been changed and created the new state board to involve the public in the renaming effort.

Board members said they have finished the work required in the 2009 law if the federal board accepts the suggested new names for places carrying the word "squaw" and if places including the word "Negro" do not have to be renamed. The board's proposed legislation would give it continued authority to handle name changes suggested by the public.

Neb. Man Sentenced In Online Solicitation Case

BEATRICE, Neb. (AP) — A Fremont man convicted of trying to meet a fictional 15-year-old girl for sex has been sentenced to probation and must register as a sex offender.

The *Beatrice Daily Sun* reports 43-year-old Mark W. Avis was sentenced Wednesday in Gage County District Court to 36 months of probation. As part of a plea deal, several charges were dropped and Avis pleaded no contest to a felony charge of enticing a child by electronic

means.

The Beatrice Police Department says Avis answered an online ad that an undercover officer posted on Craigslist. The officer told

Avis he was a woman who was prostituting her 15-year-old daughter.

Avis was arrested in February when he showed up at an arranged location.

Christmas Deadlines

The Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan will be closing at noon on Tuesday, December 24.



The following deadlines will apply:
Thursday, December 26 newspaper - Friday, December 20, 5 p.m.
Friday, December 27 newspaper - Monday, December 23, 5 p.m.
Saturday, December 28 newspaper - Tuesday, December 24, noon
Monday, December 30 newspaper - Tuesday, December 24, noon
There will be no newspaper on Wednesday, December 25, 2013

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