

STATE DIGEST

Sentencing Set In Huron Slaying

HURON (AP) — A Feb. 23 sentencing has been set for a Huron man who pleaded guilty in the killing of his pregnant girlfriend. Forty-three-year-old Shannon Flowers last month pleaded guilty to first-degree manslaughter and fetal homicide. He will avoid the death penalty under the plea deal with prosecutors but could face life in prison. Flowers initially faced murder and fetal homicide charges in the February 2009 death of 20-year-old Brittany Chua of Woonsocket and her unborn daughter. Chua was found dead from blows to the head. Authorities said she was 16 to 20 weeks pregnant.

Rounds Pushed For S.D. In Energy Meeting

PIERRE (AP) — Gov. Mike Rounds says he pushed for steps that would help South Dakota develop ethanol plants and wind power when he met this week with President Barack Obama and other federal officials. The governor says he was assured that rules taking into account land use changes in other countries will not be used to hurt Midwestern ethanol plants. He says he also urged federal officials to move fuel standards from 10 percent ethanol blends to 15 percent. Rounds says he also asked that federal agencies consider allowing existing power lines, such as those at hydropower plants at Missouri River dams, to be used to carry power generated by wind farms.

S.D. Trooper Suffers Minor Injuries In Crash

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — Authorities say a South Dakota Highway Patrol trooper suffered only minor injuries when his vehicle was hit from behind while he investigated an earlier crash. Trooper Steve Schade was parked on the shoulder of Interstate 29 shortly before 3:30 a.m. Thursday investigating a non-injury crash about five miles north of the interchange with Interstate 90. The patrol says a 22-year-old woman from Minot, N.D., who was coming upon the scene lost control of her sport utility vehicle and read-ended Schade's car. He was sitting inside at the time. Schade was treated at a Sioux Falls hospital and released. The driver of the SUV, 22-year-old Britta Cooke, was not hurt.

Neb. Lawmakers Get Wish: No Pay Raise

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska lawmakers don't want a pay raise because of budget problems, and Attorney General Jon Bruning's office agrees they shouldn't get a chance at one this year. A legal opinion issued by his office on Thursday says the Legislature overstepped the Nebraska Constitution when, in 2007, it voted to wait until this year to ask voters for a \$10,000 pay raise. Bruning's office says the proposed constitutional amendment for the raise could have been given to voters for consideration before or at the next general election, in 2008. But Bruning's office says the Legislature can't postpone the public votes on such measures after the next general election, which would have been in 2008. So, no public vote this year, no pay raise for the senators.

Record Money Spent In Rural Nebraska

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — The U.S. Agriculture Department says a record amount of money was given to programs to help rural Nebraska last year. About \$209 million from USDA funds were invested, more than half of it for housing. About \$74 million went to infrastructure such as water and wastewater treatment, and about \$21 million went toward business and energy. The aim of USDA Rural Development is to help communities provide access to affordable and essential utilities such as electricity and telecommunications. Some of the dollars spent last year came from the federal stimulus package meant to jolt the economy.

Neb. Sheriff's Captain Faces DUI Allegation

BELLEVUE, Neb. (AP) — A Sarpy County sheriff's captain is on administrative leave, pending action on his arrest for drunken driving. Bellevue officers say they pulled over John Kucer on Wednesday night around 11:30. Kucer was alone in the car. Bellevue Police Chief John Stacey says Kucer failed the field sobriety test and was taken to the Sarpy County jail in Papillion for testing. Sheriff Jeff Davis says Kucer is on leave for now and will face an internal investigation. Kucer has been with the department for 34 years. A Bellevue phone listing for Kucer has been disconnected. Case documents don't list his attorney. A jail spokeswoman said Kucer was not in custody Thursday afternoon.

Expert Pushes Tribes To Tackle Suicide, Gangs

OACOMA (AP) — Gang activity and teen suicide on American Indian reservations need to be addressed together, according to a national gang expert who says there's a strong connection between the two problems. Christopher Cuestas with the National Violence Prevention Resource Center spoke Thursday to a gathering of tribal members and legal and law enforcement officers during a "tribal listening conference" hosted by U.S. Attorney Brendan Johnson. Cuestas said that once a gang emerges in a community, the group establishes itself by recruiting and indoctrinating members. A gang during this stage will dovetail the community's risk factors, which for Indian reservations include drugs, alcohol, poverty and unemployment — the same ones linked to teen suicide. Communities need to be proactive to prevent gangs from progressing, he said. "They begin to evolve within that setting, and eventually they get to the point, if allowed to continue, to entrench themselves," he said. The conference is part of a broader initiative by the U.S. Justice Department and the first in the nation because of Johnson's work as chairman of an American Indian

issues subcommittee that reports to Attorney General Eric Holder. Johnson's office is responsible for prosecuting major crimes on South Dakota's nine Indian reservations, defined by the United States Code as "Indian country." Johnson said the state's tribes have often been heard but not listened to, and a goal of the conference is to change that. "Listening requires engagement by both parties," he said. "It requires respect and understanding, and it implies that there will be action." After opening ceremonies and comments, the larger group split into nine closed breakout sessions so tribal representatives could each meet with a U.S. attorney's office representative. John Mousseau, an Oglala Sioux tribal council member and chair of the judiciary committee, said one of the biggest problems faced by tribes is a lack of resources. Mousseau, former police chief on the Pine Ridge reservation, said the department's some 40 officers are charged with keeping about 40,000 residents safe across a reservation that's about the size of Rhode Island. He'd like to see money for training and hiring officers to "see what we can do with the right tools."

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