

STATE DIGEST

Obama Appoints Gov. Rounds To Council

PIERRE (AP) — President Barack Obama has appointed South Dakota Gov. Mike Rounds to a newly created Council of Governors.

Members will meet occasionally to offer views and advice on military and homeland defense matters.

Rounds is one of 10 people on the council, which has an equal mix of Republicans and Democrats. Appointments are for two years.

Others on the council are from Arizona, Vermont, Washington, Oklahoma, Virginia, Missouri, Maryland, North Carolina and Puerto Rico.

Dakotas Power Outages Now Minimal

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Power outages in the Dakotas caused by a late January ice storm followed by a blizzard are down to fewer than 100 rural electric customers.

Crews in North Dakota are working to restore power to 24 homes. In South Dakota, the Rural Electric Association says only about 60 homes remain in the dark. At the peak of the outages, more than 20,000 people in the two states were without electricity.

The National Weather Service says another weather system has moved into the Northern Plains that could bring half a foot of snow to some areas. But ice and strong winds that can lead to downed power lines are not in the forecast.

GF&P Building In Pierre Now Nearly Ready

PIERRE (AP) — The state Game, Fish and Parks Department says a \$2 million building project in Pierre should be completed by spring despite some weather setbacks.

Work began last summer on the facility next to the existing Missouri River Fisheries Center. It will hold wildlife staff and land management equipment.

The project will add 7,000 square feet to the existing 6,000-square-foot office and give the department a 20,000-square-foot building for equipment storage.

Another S.D. Family Adopts Haitian Children

WATERTOWN (AP) — Another South Dakota family is bringing home adopted children from the earthquake-stricken Caribbean nation of Haiti.

Andrew and Susie Hudson of Watertown are adopting 3-year-old Peterson and 5-year-old Juvenon. Susie Hudson was bringing them from Florida to South Dakota on Friday, while her husband waited at home with their other children.

The adoption went through a glitch when Peterson was mistakenly sent back to an orphanage in Haiti. Susie Hudson ended up waiting in Florida for 12 days for the problem to be resolved.

Andrew Hudson called it "an emotional roller coaster."

Lawsuits Over Center Moved To Federal Court

BEATRICE, Neb. (AP) — A federal court has taken on lawsuits filed on behalf of two residents of the Beatrice State Developmental Center who died after being moved under state order to other facilities.

The estates of Claudia Wright and Sara Schnell sued state officials last month in Gage County District Court. The lawsuits say the state allowed the center for the developmentally disabled to become unsafe.

Wright and Schnell were among 47 "medically fragile" residents moved from the center last year over concerns about adequate care.

The lawsuits seek a jury trial and unspecified damages.

A similar lawsuit filed on behalf of six Beatrice center residents also is pending in federal court.

Indian Man Pleads In Brokerage Hack Scam

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — An Indian man has pleaded guilty to participating in a scheme to access online brokerage accounts to jack up stock prices and reap thousands of dollars in illegal profits.

Jaisankar Marimuthu pleaded guilty Friday to several charges, including securities fraud and identity theft.

Marimuthu faces up to seven years in prison when he is sentenced on April 26.

The Justice Department says Marimuthu is one of three men involved in a "hack, pump and dump" scheme that affected at least 95 customers and nine U.S. brokerages, including Omaha-based TD Ameritrade.

In 2008, Thirugnanam Ramanathan was sentenced to two years in prison and ordered to pay \$362,000 for his role. He has been returned to India.

Chockalingam Ramanathan remains at large.

Nebraska State Union Rejects Governor's Request For Pay Freeze

Rejection Will Likely Force Lawmakers To Slash State Budget Even Further

BY NATE JENKINS
Associated Press Writer

LINCOLN, Neb. — A union representing about 11,000 Nebraska state workers rejected Gov. Dave Heineman's request that they forgo pay raises next fiscal year, a move Heineman hinted could lead to layoffs.

"I'm very disappointed in the union's decision," Heineman said in an e-mail to reporters. "This was a good-faith attempt to save jobs and do what was best for all state employees and Nebraska taxpayers."

Heineman asked the union last month for members to give up 2.5 percent raises set to begin July 1. Union officials said then there was a good chance they'd agree if certain conditions were met.

But union director Julie Dake Abel said Friday that Heineman's administration made no guarantees there'd be no or limited layoffs and didn't respond to questions about how many jobs might be saved if they agreed to the freeze.

"We had no guarantee of job security," Dake Abel said.

Bill Wood, director of employee relations for the state and its chief negotiator, said it told the union 262 jobs might be saved, and he didn't think the union had formally asked for a guarantee

that a certain number would be spared.

Wood added that a guarantee wouldn't be possible because the state won't know until after an economic forecasting board meets in a few weeks how much the state's budget hole has grown.

Union members also were unhappy that there was no guarantee that managers not covered by the union contract would have their pay frozen. Dake Gabel said.

"He needs to look to be the leader and sacrifice, not just ask the lowest-paid people," Dake Gabel said of the governor. In previous years, managers haven't give up as much as union employees, she added.

Wood said the governor offered to freeze nonunion employees' wages if union members agreed to his request. Heineman sent the union a letter last month saying 2,900 lower and middle managers not covered by union contracts would have their pay frozen if the union agreed to a pay freeze.

It's too early to say whether those managers will have their pay frozen despite the union's rejection of Heineman's request,

Wood said.

Combined, freezing the wages of those managers and union workers would save the state \$10 million next fiscal year.

About 230 directors and managers that report directly to Heineman will not get raises next year.

The union's rejection of Heineman's request could force lawmakers make more budget cuts should state revenue projections drop again when they are released later this month. Also, fiscal analysts say state government may have to close a \$640 million budget gap projected for the next two-year budget cycle that begins in July 2011.

All of that is on the heels of an emergency legislative session held in November where lawmakers and Heineman slashed \$334 million from the current, two-year state budget to stay out of the red.

Last month in reports to lawmakers, state agencies pointed to more than 200 jobs, from janitors to top-level administrators, that could be eliminated or left vacant because of budget cuts made by the Legislature.

Because those jobs include both union and nonunion employees, it's unclear how many, if any, of them could be spared if the union agreed to a pay freeze.



Heineman

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Neb. Court Tells Insurers To Pay In Pollution Case

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The Nebraska Supreme Court on Friday upheld a decision ordering two insurance companies to pay about \$550,000 of the cost of cleaning up industrial contamination in Hastings.

The ruling sets the standard in Nebraska for determining how much insurance companies are responsible for when they insure a company for only part of the time that the contamination occurred.

The Supreme Court said The Continental Insurance Co. and Northern Insurance Co. of New York should pay, but the court agreed with a lower court's ruling that the insurers should only be held responsible for part of the damages. Both companies insured Dutton-Lainson Co. during part of the four decades that

it contributed to groundwater pollution in Hastings.

Continental has been ordered to pay more than \$475,000. Northern has been ordered to pay almost \$75,000.

The court refused Dutton-Lainson's appeal seeking \$4.9 million from the insurance companies to cover damages and the cost of defending itself.

Continental's attorney did not immediately respond to messages left Friday morning.

Dutton-Lainson was one of several companies that settled with the Environmental Protection Agency over groundwater contamination. The Hastings-based maker of tools and trailer parts took some chemicals and byproducts of its manufacturing operation to city landfills because the law required it at the time.

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