

Bill Would Make Youth Sports Fees Tax Exempt

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — The loss of sales tax revenue is a small price to pay for healthier children in Nebraska.

That's the message Sen. Abbie Cornett of Bellevue had for the Legislature's Revenue Committee on Wednesday.

Cornett is sponsoring a bill that would exempt entry fees to certain youth sports events or leagues from the state sales tax. Under the measure, city-run programs or nonprofit organizations would not have to pay state sales tax on entry fees for participants.

A state tax commissioner ruling late last year said the sales tax law applies to recreational activities for youngsters.

Cornett says youth sports events for those 18 and under should be exempt from the tax. She says removing that tax burden would help more families afford to enroll their children in healthy sports activities.

Neb. Man Arrested In \$600K Theft From Uncle

PAWNEE CITY, Neb. (AP) — A southeast Nebraska man is accused of stealing over \$600,000 from his elderly uncle.

The Nebraska State Patrol says 55-year-old Lewis Rakosnik was arrested on Tuesday at his uncle's home in Pawnee City on felony charges of knowing and intentional abuse of a vulnerable adult.

The patrol says Rakosnik is suspected of liquidating over \$600,000 of his uncle's assets over an 11-month period.

Authorities say Rakosnik moved into his uncle's home and was given durable power of attorney. The patrol says he sold land, cashed in CDs and transferred money from his uncle's bank account.

The patrol did not identify the uncle.

Rakosnik's case is not on the online court system, and it's not known if he has an attorney.

Committee Holds Off Voting On 'Hope Card' Bill

PIERRE (AP) — A newly amended bill that would introduce a "hope card" system related to protection orders in South Dakota is making slow progress in the House.

Under the original bill, South Dakotans with protection orders could carry a "hope card" instead of the longer paper document.

Proponents of the bill say this would speed up the process for law enforcement officers who need to verify the order's existence.

On Wednesday, the House Judiciary committee postponed voting on the bill because Republican Rep. Patricia Stricherz of Madison introduced an amendment that would allow for an electronic version of the program.

But the amendment did not include a fiscal note on how much that would cost, so lawmakers put off voting on the bill.

Lawmakers may pick up where they left off Monday.

Neb. Seeks To Expand Lawmaker Term Limits

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A Nebraska senator says a decision to limit lawmakers to two consecutive terms in office has given more power to lobbyists, political parties and the governor.

Holdrege Sen. Tom Carlson told the Legislature's Executive Board Wednesday that he supports term limits, but questioned whether two back-to-back terms are enough to adequately serve Nebraskans.

Carlson has introduced a constitutional amendment proposal (LR358CA) that would allow lawmakers to serve up to three consecutive terms, for a total of 12 years in office.

Nebraska's term limits for lawmakers went into effect in 2006, after voters approved them in 2000.

The proposal has drawn support from the Nebraska Farm Bureau, the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry and ACLU Nebraska. No one testified against the proposal on Wednesday.

Neb. Patrol Nets 27lbs Marijuana In Two Stops

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — The Nebraska State Patrol says two separate traffic stops on Interstate 80 near Lincoln have led to the seizure of nearly 27 pounds of marijuana.

The patrol says the first occurred Tuesday morning, when a trooper stopped an eastbound car. A patrol dog indicated an odor of drugs, and a search turned up three pounds of marijuana in a suitcase in the car's trunk.

Several hours later, a trooper stopped an eastbound sport utility vehicle. A search of that vehicle uncovered nearly 24 pounds of marijuana in 20 individual packages hidden in two totes.

Both drivers — one from Antioch, Ill., and the other from Lawn-dale, Calif. — were arrested on suspicion of possession of mari-juana with intent to deliver.

Lawmakers Reject Prairie Dog Lawsuit Bill

PIERRE (AP) — A South Dakota House committee has killed a measure that would have allowed ranchers to sue for damages if the state failed to control the population of prairie dogs.

The State Affairs Committee voted 9-4 to reject the bill after law-makers said the state should not be sued for problems caused by federal officials.

The proposal was written in response to a recent Supreme Court ruling that said the state is immune from a lawsuit filed by ranchers who contend the state has failed to follow laws requiring the control of prairie dogs that move from public land to private land.

State officials say they did all they could to control prairie dogs near Badlands National Park, but control was limited because poi-soning was not allowed on some federal land.

Jet With Hydraulic Problems Lands In Omaha

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A mechanical problem forced a Delta jet to be towed to a terminal gate after it landed at Omaha's Eppley Airfield.

Delta Airlines Flight 1605 was headed to Omaha from Atlanta on Tuesday night when a cockpit indicator signaled a possible problem with the hydraulics system.

Delta spokesman Anthony Black says the Airbus 319 with 78 people and 5 crew landed safely a little before 7 p.m. The hydraulic prob-lem affected the landing gear, so the jet was towed to a gate for unloading.

The plane was repaired and returned to service on Wednesday.

OBITUARIES

Bonnie Jo Ketter

BLOOMFIELD, Neb. — Bonnie Jo Ketter, 48, of Bloomfield, Neb., died from natural causes on Tuesday, Jan. 31, 2012, at her residence.

Funeral services are at 2 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 4, at Wintz & Ray Funeral Home, Yankton, with the Rev. David Lund officiating. Burial will be in the Garden of Memories Cemetery in Yankton.

Visitation is one hour prior to the funeral service at the funeral home.

To send an online sympathy card, visit wintzrayfuneralhome.com.

Irene Currier

Irene Ida Currier, 100, of Yank-ton died Wednesday, Feb. 1, 2012, at Avera Sister James Care Cen-ter, Yankton.

Funeral services are at 10:30 a.m. Saturday at Trondhjem Lutheran Church, rural Volin, with the Rev. Mark Ostrem offici-

ating. Burial will be in the Garden of Memories Cemetery, Yankton.

Visitation with the family present is 4-8 p.m. Friday at Wintz & Ray Funeral Home in Yankton. Visitation also continues one hour prior to the funeral service at the church.

To send an online sympathy message, visit wintzrayfuneral-home.com.

Madison Shooting Victim A Retired Teacher

UPDATE: 9:56 p.m. Wednesday — Attorney General Marty Jackley and Lake County States Attorney Ken Meyer announced late Wednesday that Carl V. Ericsson, 73, Water-town, had been arrested on one count of first degree murder for the death of Norman Johnson.

In a press release, Jackley said the this offense is a class C felony, punishable by life imprisonment in the state penitentiary and/or a \$50,000 fine.

This case is being investigated by the Madison Police Department and the Division of Criminal Investigation.

No other information was available at press time.

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MADISON (AP) — A shooting in the eastern South Dakota city of Madison took the life of a 72-year-old retired English teacher and track coach, the Associated Press has learned.

Norman Johnson was retired from teaching at Madison High School and an active member of the Trinity Lutheran Church. Pastor Dirk Hagmaier said his congregation is shocked that such an active and well-liked community member was the victim in the Tuesday night shooting. Police are still scouring the city for a suspect.

"He was very committed to the church and to the community," Hagmaier said. "Children — many children — would have gone hungry if not for him."

Hagmaier said a community gathering was planned for last night (Wednesday) at the church at 203 N. Harth Ave.

After the shooting, police went door-to-door in Johnson's neighborhood — specifically along Northwest Fifth Street, where he lived with his wife, Barbara — asking if residents had seen anything suspicious. Many of the city's 6,500 residents had left on their porch lights overnight in hopes of helping police spot the suspect.

"People are scared to go to school," said Maisie Hewitt, 14, who lives just a block from the crime scene and was feeling ill after getting little sleep overnight. Like many high school-ers, she chose to stay home from Madison High School on Wednesday. Madison Central schools held classes, but officials put the schools under a lockdown to prevent students from leaving until the end of the school day.

Alan Serfling, who lives two houses away from the crime scene on Fifth Street, said he and his wife were in Brookings until 9 p.m. but returned home to the commotion and a warn-ing from police officers.

"They told us to stay in the house, keep the door locked," said Serfling, who has lived in the neighborhood for 35 years. "Usually, noth-ing happens on this street."

Jon Lauck, senior advisor to U.S. Sen. John Thune, grew up in Madison and is a former student of Johnson's. He said he couldn't imagine why anyone would have shot Johnson.

"He was an extremely good teacher, a very good mentor and a great citizen of Madison," Lauck said. "He was very active in the commu-nity and always willing to help students whether in the classroom or on the track

field."

Johnson's brown, wood-shingled house — roped off with yellow crime tape Wednesday morning — is in a quiet, well-established neighborhood across the street from Memorial Park. The picturesque area includes a walking path and a frozen, winding waterway.

The edge of Dakota State University is a block away across the divided Egan Avenue. Students at the school were notified through emails and texts shortly after the incident, and the school made sure classrooms were locked down and residence halls were secure, said Jesse Kane, vice president of student affairs and dean of students. The college has about 1,200 students, including 600 who live on campus.

University classes were scheduled as nor-mal Wednesday morning after police de-scribed the crime as an isolated incident, though Kane acknowledged lingering anxiety among some students, staff and faculty.

"Our communication with police indicated there wasn't any foreseeable threat to the campus community or community at large," Kane said.

"I was speaking with an employee who said she has lived here all her life," Kane said. "She said she has seen only two incidents like this in the last 60 years."

Lauck, a history buff, said the last slaying he can recall in the area was in 1906 at Lake Herman. South Dakota law-enforcement officials reported 23 homicides statewide to the FBI in 2010, the last year for which data is complete.

U.N.L. To Search For Bedbugs

BY GRANT SCHULTE
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Officials at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln said Wednesday they will search every dorm room on campus for bedbugs after an infestation was discovered earlier this month.

University officials said they've spent \$20,000 since Jan. 9 on ser-vices and equipment to get rid of the reddish-brown, wingless pests, and could end up paying \$100,000 for a bug-killing effort expected to last at least a month.

Vice Chancellor for Student Af-fairs Juan Franco said 25 student rooms so far have tested positive in three residence halls: Abel, Sell-eck Quadrangle and the Village. A sweep through the residence halls has located the bugs on couches, in closets and in residence hall lobby areas, but university officials said the infestation was relatively small.

"We are telling students if there's any suspicion at all of bugs in the rooms or in their belongings, to let us know — whether it's a

bite or they actually see one, or they just suspect," Franco said.

The university is using a rat ter-rier named Spots to detect the bugs, and may bring in other dogs from Minneapolis that are capable of locating bedbugs. Work crews will likely scour the rooms again after students leave in May to en-sure the bugs are gone.

Brian Shanks, the university's associate director for residence life, said the university was ex-ploring a ban on used furniture or carpet that might carry bedbugs. But he acknowledged that such a policy would be difficult to enforce.

Glenn Schumann, the associate director for facilities, said roughly 10 percent of the items found in student rooms so far could qualify as havens for bedbugs.

Franco said the university will heat infested rooms to about 120 degrees for up to four hours to kill the pests. The university also has spent \$7,000 on a carbon dioxide machine that freezes the bugs and bought eight thermal pouches

apiece \$450 apiece that can clear the bugs off smaller items, such as backpacks.

Franco said the university will "pay whatever it takes to take care of the problem."

Bedbugs are widely viewed as nocturnal pests that spread quickly and are difficult to kill. The bugs can cause itchiness and skin welts, but do not carry dis-eases. More than 30 colleges and universities have reported bed-bug problems in the last five years, according to a list provided by the university.

University of Nebraska-Lincoln senior Amanda Wekesser said she first discovered bites her neck, back, shoulders and legs around Jan. 8, the day after students re-turned from winter break. The me-teorology-climatology major she found two mite-sized bugs — one in her carpet, and one on a futon — and killed them both. She found two more last weekend, and placed a live one in a Styrofoam cup for testing, which later con-firmed it was a bedbug.

Foes Of North Dakota Property Tax Measure Say Idea Is 'Radical'

BY DALE WETZEL
Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. — Abolishing North Dakota's property taxes would end local control over projects and services and drive up state sales and income taxes to make up the lost revenue, the proposal's critics said Wednesday.

An assortment of organiza-tions, some of which depend on property tax revenues, have formed a coalition to fight a pro-posed constitutional amendment that would ban property taxes.

North Dakotans will decide the question when they vote in June on the amendment, which will be listed as Measure 2 on the ballot.

The group, Keep It Local North Dakota, held news conferences in Bismarck, Fargo and Grand Forks on Wednesday to publicize what members said were the amend-ment's shortcomings.

The proposal bans property taxes — which are a key source of money for cities, counties, school and park districts, and other local governments — and orders the Legislature to craft a way to re-place the money. At least \$730 mil-lion annually would be needed.

If the amendment were ap-proved, city and county commis-sioners, school board members and others would have the monu-mental job of cajoling legislators for money for local projects, said Andy Peterson, president of the North Dakota Chamber of Com-merce and a spokesman for the anti-Measure 2 coalition.

"We don't think that's a good thing that when the city of Man-

dan or Bismarck or Grand Forks or Williston or any of these com-munities need to put up a stop-light, need to hire more police or (firefighters), need to build a building or a street — essentially, they would have to come to the state Legislature in Bismarck to get permission to do that," Peter-son said.

Putting a property tax ban into the North Dakota Constitution would force lawmakers to contem-plate raising state taxes on sales and income, Peterson said. It could negate lawmakers' efforts in recent years to lower income tax rates for corporations and individ-uals, he said.

"If the income and corporate income tax goes up, and goes up dramatically, to cover this shift, it will chase employers out of the state," he said. "That means jobs go away."

Supporters of the measure say high property taxes are forcing people out of homes they've paid for, because they can no longer af-ford the property tax bills.

They contend the coalition is made up mostly of organizations that benefit from property taxes. Its members include the North Dakota League of Cities, the Asso-ciation of Counties, the state Pub-lic Employees Association and the North Dakota Education Associa-tion, whose members are public school teachers.

Robert Hale, a Minot attorney and businessman who helped to draft the measure, said it would give local governments discretion

in how to spend their replacement aid.

"It does give local control. Right now, there isn't any," Hale said. "It allows the spending of the revenues to be decided by the local elected officials. Measure 2 gives them exactly what they claim they want."

Hale believes eliminating the property tax would spur business development in the state.

"More research has gone into the development of this than probably anything that has been on the North Dakota ballot, ever," he said.

Peterson said a number of business groups are opposing the measure, in part because they fear it will cause an upheaval in the state's tax structure.

"Businesses want predictabil-ity. They want to know what's coming," he said. "And they want to know that if taxes are going to change, there's a long-term plan, not a knee-jerk reaction."

S.D. House Com. Rejects Education Proposal

PIERRE (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers rejected a proposal Wednesday that would have boosted state fi-nancial aid to school districts by tying the funding to overall revenue growth rather than inflation.

The Republican-led House Education Committee voted 9-5 to kill a bill that would have required school aid to rise each year by the same per-centage state revenues grow, up to a maximum of 6 percent a year. Current state law re-quires that aid rise each year by the rate of inflation, up to a maximum of 3 percent.

Democratic Rep. Larry Lucas of Mission, the bill's main sponsor, had argued schools should share in the good fortune in years when state tax revenue grows sub-stantially. He said the change would help districts recover from recent cuts.

Yankton School Superin-tendent Joseph Gertsema said his district has been spending reserves and eliminated at least 34 positions in recent years including bus drivers, administrators and teachers.

"We're one of the larger school districts in South Dakota and we need help in state aid," he said.

But Jim Terwilliger, an economist with the South Dakota Bureau of Finance and Management, told the commit-tee the policy would have locked the state into spending more on education at a time when federal budget cuts, the health care overhaul and other factors could force the state to spend more on Medi-caid and other programs.

"I don't believe it's a good business decision to set our budget up for an additional burden we may or may not be able to afford to pay," Ter-williger said.

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