

## Accused Shooter's Neighbors Shocked

WATERTOWN (AP) — Neighbors of a 73-year-old Watertown man accused of fatally shooting his long-ago classmate say they're shocked at the accusation.

Carl Ericsson is charged with shooting 72-year-old retired Madison High School teacher and track coach Norman Johnson after Johnson answered the door at his house on Tuesday evening in Madison.

Vicki Crow tells the Watertown Public Opinion that Carl Ericsson seemed like a nice guy and she found out about the shooting after commotion in their neighborhood when he was arrested Wednesday.

Ericsson was denied bond Thursday during his first court appearance on a first-degree murder charge.

Another neighbor who didn't give his name says Ericsson seemed like a normal guy and his wife was always very kind when they saw her.

## Woman To Challenge Rep. Noem In Primary

MITCHELL (AP) — A Rapid City woman says she plans to challenge Rep. Kristi Noem in a Republican primary for South Dakota's lone seat in the U.S. House.

Forty-six-year-old Stephanie Strong tells the *Daily Republic* of Mitchell she is collecting the 1,955 signatures she needs to put her name on the June 5 primary ballot.

Strong has owned several businesses with her husband. She says she believes government should reduce business regulations.

Strong is the only announced Republican challenger to Noem, who defeated Democratic Rep. Stephanie Herseth Sandlin in 2010. Noem recently announced she has raised more than \$1.3 million for her re-election bid.

Candidates for the Democratic nomination to run for the House are Matt Varelek, a former member of U.S. Sen. Tim Johnson's staff, and Minnehaha County Commissioner Jeff Barth.

## S.D. Senators To Decide Fate Of Mascot Bill

PIERRE (AP) — South Dakota has a state bread, state soil, state sport and even state grass. Soon, it could also have a state mascot.

Republican Sen. Tom Nelson of Lead is sponsoring a bill that aims to elevate the bison's status. The bill does not strip coyotes of their state animal title.

Nelson says that bison play a big role in the state. He cites South Dakota's annual Buffalo Roundup each fall, when at least 1,000 bison get brought into corrals in Custer, and the animal's significance to Native Americans.

At a hearing Wednesday, a Senate committee passed the bill 9-0. The full Senate will decide the bill's future during a floor vote Monday.

## Decision Expected Monday In Guard Killing

SIoux FALLS (AP) — A judge is expected to decide Monday morning whether an inmate who has admitted killing a South Dakota prison guard should be sentenced to death for the crime.

Forty-nine-year-old Rodney Berget pleaded guilty to killing 63-year-old Ronald Johnson during a failed prison escape April 12. On Thursday, Berget told Judge Bradley Zell that he believes he should be sentenced to death for the slaying.

Zell already sentenced Berget's confessed cohort and fellow inmate Eric Robert to death. The men beat Johnson and wrapped plastic around his head, then stole his uniform in hopes of slipping past other guards.

Both Berget and Robert chose to let a judge, not a jury, decide if they should be put to death.

The court announced the sentencing date in a Friday news release.

## Bill Calls For Pledge Of Allegiance At School

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Patriotism and the value of U.S. citizenship would be recognized first thing in the morning in all Nebraska public schools, under a bill up for debate next week in the state Legislature.

Sen. Tony Fulton of Lincoln says a United States flag should be posted in every public school classroom and students should be led in the Pledge of Allegiance during the first class of every school day.

Starting this fall, all K-12 classrooms would have a flag and pupils would be led in a group recitation of the pledge.

Fulton says he thinks most schools say the pledge up until about fifth grade, but older students need to be reminded to be respectful.

He says he sees too many teens ignoring the National Anthem at school sporting events.

## S.D. Game Agency Reports 100 Dead Pigeons

RAPID CITY (AP) — The South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks Department is investigating about 100 suspicious deaths in downtown Rapid City — and the victims are all pigeons.

John Kanta, regional wildlife manager for the department, tells the Associated Press that dozens of bird corpses have been recovered since Thursday afternoon. The deaths are mysterious enough that samples have been flown to a lab in Madison, Wis., in hopes of determining the cause.

Kanta says the birds could have been sickened by mold or bacteria, but officials suspect they were poisoned.

Kanta says officials are "worried about the incidental loss we might see with other animals" — specifically peregrine falcons.

He acknowledges that some people have motive to off the birds — especially business owners whose customers have to walk through pigeon droppings.

## Experts:

# S.D. Should Ready For Oil Boom's Pros, Cons

BY VERONICA ZAROGVIA  
Associated Press

BELLE FOURCHE — North Dakota's oil boom brings with it tremendous wealth and enormous problems — and both are coming to South Dakota, industry experts say.

South Dakota has oil wells in counties such as Butte and Harding. The state isn't poised to compete with North Dakota — which is expected to soon become the second-biggest oil-producing state behind Texas — but experts say that crude-carrying areas should prepare to see some of the same prosperity and problems.

Among the pending difficulties: increased traffic, housing shortages and skyrocketing rents.

Those issues were laid out for about 600 people who filled the Belle Fourche Area Community Center's auditorium late Thursday for a town hall meeting called "Coming Down the Pipe." The event was designed for experts to talk about the frenzy in North Dakota's oil patch that is already trickling south.

"We want people to understand the effect of development and the stress it puts on the community," said Lynn Hammerstrom, former president of First Interstate Bank who lives in Belle

Fourche, a town in northwestern South Dakota with about 5,700 residents.

The standing-room-only crowd listened to a panel of oil industry, infrastructure and economics experts, who gathered to answer questions about what residents and community leaders should do as South Dakota inches toward tapping its oil potential.

"Make sure you focus. It's all about planning," said Gene Veeder, a panel speaker and executive director of McKenzie County Job Development Authority who said constructing single-family units and affordable housing should be a priority.

Veeder should know: North Dakota's McKenzie County has seen rent prices steadily climb to averages of \$1,500 to \$2,000, he said.

"If you need 1,000 workers, you need to figure it out," he said. "I love the oil industry, but communities can say, 'We love you, but this is how we're going to do it.'"

But panelists said South Dakotans should embrace the possibilities. Truck drivers bring business, and communities will need parking, restaurants, truck stops and highway expansion — all of which will translate to more jobs, they said.

Already, U.S. 85 in South Dakota was ex-

panded to a four-lane highway in December 2010 to handle heavier traffic traveling to North Dakota's oil patch.

Cal Klewin, executive director of the Theodore Roosevelt Expressway, described the truck stop on Highway 12 and U.S. 85 in Bowman, N.D., a town of fewer than 2,000 residents, where between 50 and 90 trucks stop each night.

Each morning, the buzz in town is about how many trucks had camped out the night before, Klewin said.

The trucks are carrying hay, pumps, tanks, pipes and equipment, and their route extends as far south as Houston all the way to the border with Canada.

Jim LeMar, a Rapid City construction worker, was among the concerned audience members. He experienced the boom in Gillette, Wyo., in the 1970s when oil, coal and uranium production exploded.

"This is huge in comparison," he said of North Dakota's boom. The state has outpaced predictions, last month surpassing a milestone of half a million barrels of oil a day. It now accounts for about 10 percent of total U.S. crude oil production, up from just 1 percent in 2007.

## Neb. High Court Backs Learning Community Taxes

BY JOSH FUNK  
Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — The Nebraska Supreme Court ruled that a board that oversees 11 Omaha-area school districts can continue to levy property taxes that help fund the schools, overturning a lower court decision.

In a decision released Friday, the high court said it is clear that the taxes assessed by the Learning Community serve a mostly local purpose. It pointed out that the tax rate is the same for all the districts and that each derives some benefit from the revenues.

A Sarpy County court had found the Learning Community board's taxes unconstitutional because it said the taxes served a state purpose. Property taxes can be levied for local purposes, but

the state constitution prohibits the levying of property taxes for state purposes.

"The legislative history makes it clear that the learning community legislation was enacted to resolve specific, local problems and that the predominant purpose of the legislation was not to benefit the state as a whole," the high court said in its ruling.

The Learning Community was created by the Legislature in 2006 and oversees common property tax levies among 11 school districts in Douglas and Sarpy counties. The community's intent is to de-emphasize district borders and sharpen the focus on achievement and diversity.

Learning Community CEO Ted Stilwell praised the high court's ruling.

"It confirms a basic fairness in educational funding, allowing us

to work together on what really matters in education," Stilwell said. "We are pleased that our member school districts will continue to receive dollars based on student need."

Learning Community attorney Kurth Brashear said the court's unanimous decision should end any questions about the board's tax authority.

"It's a great affirmation of the work the legislature did in creating learning communities," Brashear said.

Matthew Rusch, an attorney for the plaintiffs, didn't immediately respond to a phone message seeking comment Friday morning.

The Learning Community's property taxes came under fire because the board has been redistributing tax revenue and state aid between the 11 districts

within the community to make funding more equitable. That means that districts with high numbers of poor students and low property tax revenue get more money — much of that coming from districts with higher property tax revenue.

The lawsuit filed by the Sarpy County Farm Bureau and eight residents objected to that system because they believed it was unfair for some school districts to receive more money at the expense of taxpayers in other districts. But the high court disagreed.

Public school districts included in the Learning Community are Omaha, Elkhorn, Millard, Ralston, Bennington, Bellevue, Pappillon-La Vista, Gretna, South Sarpy, Douglas County West and Westside Community schools.

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