

S.D. Panel Rejects School Spending Goal

PIERRE (AP) — A South Dakota House panel has rejected a measure that sought to increase state funding for school districts.

The State Affairs Committee voted 9-2 along party lines to kill the proposal by minority Democrats.

The measure would have set a funding goal equal to the average spent by South Dakota and six surrounding states. If that goal were met, annual spending would jump about \$1,700 per student.

House Democratic Leader Bernie Hunhoff of Yankton says after the non-binding goal was set, the Legislature could have decided how to come up with money to meet that goal.

Opponents say increased spending does not necessarily lead to improved student performance.

Hunhoff says South Dakota will lose some of its best teachers if it continues to spend less on education than nearby states.

Committee Rejects Plan For New State Flag

PIERRE (AP) — A South Dakota House panel has rejected a proposal to redesign the state flag.

The measure's main sponsor, Rep. Bernie Hunhoff of Yankton, says the current flag does not do enough to promote South Dakota because it consists only of the official state seal on a blue background.

But the State Affairs Committee voted 7-4 Monday to kill the measure after members of the Republican majority said they do not want to abandon a flag that has featured the state seal for more than a century.

Hunhoff's bill originally proposed a new design done by Spearfish artist Dick Termes, featuring a Native American medicine wheel surrounded by sunshine rays on a sky-blue background.

Hunhoff changed the bill Monday to propose a competition for a new design.

Inmate Pleads Guilty To Threatening President

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A Nebraska inmate has pleaded guilty to threatening President Barack Obama.

Loren Hamlin, of McCook, was indicted in November with making threats against the president. Federal prosecutors say he sent a letter from prison saying he would "track down" and kill the president.

The *Lincoln Journal Star* says Hamlin pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court in Lincoln last Friday. He faces up to 5 years in prison when he's sentenced in April.

Hamlin is currently serving 3-to-5 years in prison for burglary in McCook in 2010.

South Dakota

Child Sexual Abuse Bill Is Rejected

BY VERONICA ZARAGOVIA
Associated Press

PIERRE — A House committee on Monday rejected a bill that would have eliminated the time limit for victims of childhood sexual abuse to file civil lawsuits against perpetrators or institutions, despite emotional testimony from victims during a two hour hearing.

Several cried loudly by the elevator after members of the House Judiciary Committee voted to kill the bill 9-4.

A number were American Indian and said they were abused by Catholic clergy at churches or boarding schools.

"I went through a lot of suffering when I was 7-10 years old," said Isadore Zephier, a member of the Sioux Tribe who asked committee members to picture what happened to him. "Imagine yourself sodomized or performing oral sex on a

priest for three, four years constantly."

South Dakota allows victims to file civil lawsuits against perpetrators, but not institutions or other individuals, within three years of when the abuse took place or three years from the time the victim discovered the injuries caused by the abuse. The bill sponsored by Rep. Steve Hickey, R-Sioux Falls, would have lifted those limits.

Supporters said the current law wasn't fair to children who might not feel comfortable reporting abuse until they are older.

"We don't know about perpetrators because in South Dakota, the laws keep victims out of the court before they're able to get to court," said Marci Hamilton, a law school professor at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law in New York who testified by telephone. "This bill would open the courthouse so that anyone abused would name the perpetrators and South

Dakota would know where the trouble spots are."

But opponent Mike Shaw, a lobbyist for the Property Casualty Insurers Association of America, said "lines must be drawn" against lawsuits brought forth after witnesses and perpetrators have died.

Steve Smith, a Chamberlain attorney who has represented the St. Joseph's Indian School, spoke in favor of the statute of limitations before it became law in 2010. He said Monday that it ended "an unwavering ability to sue, waiting for perhaps the perpetrator to be dead so that the perpetrator can no longer defend himself."

He added that victims can sue perpetrators until they die, "so you can get vindication. You can identify that person and have his name brought out in the press. You didn't allow a hidden agenda to be done on behalf of the Catholic Church."

Neb. Bill Targets Info Released By Employers

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Employers would be able to divulge more information about their former employees without fear of a lawsuit, under a bill being debated in the Legislature's Business and Labor Committee.

Sen. Charlie Janssen of Fremont brought the measure that would allow employers to loosen their tongues a bit when they get calls about former workers.

He says a free flow of information would help employers find the right

workers and help workers show the good things they did in their previous jobs.

Businesses often encourage management to give out little information when asked about former employee because of the possibility of a lawsuit.

Legislative Bill 959 would allow an employer to provide, in good faith, information about job performance.

The employer would not be held civilly liable for the disclosure.

Senate OKs State Mascot Bill

PIERRE (AP) — South Dakota is one step closer to designating the bison as the state mascot.

The Senate has passed Sen. Tom Nelson's "Buffalo Bill" 25-10. It now heads to the House for a vote.

Nelson, a Republican from Lead, says bison play a privileged 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, the animal's significance to Native Americans and the name of the town in the state's northwest.

He says that designating bison as the state mascot would give the animal the "status it deserves."

Brookings Republican Sen. Larry Tidemann, a South Dakota State University alum, joked that the state's mascot is the jackrabbit.

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