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Winter Storm Watch Posted For Area

From P&D and AP Reports

The Yankton area is bracing for a winter storm that could dump close to a foot of snow in some parts of Nebraska.

Much of south-central and south-eastern South Dakota and most of Nebraska were under winter weather watches and warnings for late tonight (Wednesday) through late Thursday as a large storm is expected to barrel out of the southwestern U.S. and move

across the Central Plains.

The immediate Yankton area will be under a winter storm watch for late tonight through Thursday. At press time, forecasts called for a possible 5-9 inches of snow across Yankton, Bon Homme, Charles Mix, Douglas and Hutchinson counties in South Dakota, as well as Cedar and Knox counties in Nebraska. The weather service said the

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S.D. Senate Says Yes to Texting Ban

Measure To Stop Messaging While Driving Goes To House

BY CHET BROKAW
Associated Press

PIERRE — A measure that would ban texting while driving was approved Tuesday by the state Senate after supporters said South Dakota needs to join the 39 other states that prohibit the dangerous practice.

Senators voted 24-9 to approve the bill and send it to the House of Representatives, which has rejected similar bills in recent years.

The bill would prohibit typing, sending or reading a text message while driving, but it would continue to allow drivers to make cellphone calls and use hands-free electronic devices to handle text-based messages. It also would prevent cities from imposing any ordinance that varies from state law, a provision lawmakers said is needed to prevent a patchwork of bans across the state. Four South Dakota cities have imposed their own texting bans in the past year.

The measure's main sponsor, Sen. Mike Vehle, R-Mitchell, said a texting ban might be difficult to enforce, but a statewide law would deter most people from texting while driving simply because it would be illegal. Vehle said cultural changes reduced drunken driving and increased the use of seat belts after laws were passed to cover those issues.

"It's time to change the culture in South Dakota. Texting and driving is not safe," Vehle said.

Sen. David Omdahl, R-Sioux Falls, said he agrees that texting while driving is dangerous, but he opposes the bill because such activity is already banned by the state's careless driving law.

"Why pass another law when we have an existing law that's not being enforced as it should?" Omdahl said.

Vehle countered that law officers generally do not ticket people for careless driving until they see them do something dangerous on the road and that's often too late to prevent an accident.

Sen. Larry Rhoden, R-Union Center, said people who do not wear seat belts or motorcycle helmets put themselves in danger, but drivers who text threaten everyone else on the road.

"You make that decision to text and drive, you affect other people's safety. Ergo, your rights have ended," Rhoden said.

Sen. Ryan Maher, R-Isabel, tried unsuccessfully to change the bill so a ban would apply only in the state's largest cities, arguing the ban is not needed in South Dakota's rural areas. He noted there are only seven stop lights in his entire legislative district, which covers a huge area in northwestern South Dakota.

But the Senate rejected Maher's suggestion after Vehle said the law needs to be the same everywhere in the state. Otherwise, travelers would not know where texting is banned, he said.

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INSIDE TODAY



American Profile

Forum Tackles Medicaid Expansion

BY ANDREW ATWAL
andrew.atwal@yankton.net

The pros and cons of Medicaid expansion were discussed during a forum held at Mount Marty Tuesday.

Joy Smolnisky, director of the South Dakota Budget and Policy Project, reviewed the potential positives and negatives of Medicaid expansion and also took time to answer audience members' questions.

Smolnisky said the Affordable Care Act has five components to it that will not change regardless of potential Medicaid expansion in South Dakota. Those components include coverage guarantees, insurance exchanges, federal tax credits to help pay for insurance, an individual mandate and funding provisions.

"The main concept of health care remains the same: If someone is sick, we will treat them," she said. "However, with provisions in the Affordable Care Act, no one can be turned down for insurance because of preexisting conditions. Insurance also has to be affordable, given someone's income level."

Smolnisky added that 20 percent of non-elderly South Dakota adults do not currently have insurance, and that number could come down if Medicaid expands in the state.



KELLY HERTZ/P&D

Joy Smolnisky, director of the South Dakota Budget and Policy Project, discusses the pros and cons of South Dakota joining the Medicaid expansion plan, during a forum held Tuesday at Mount Marty College.

One of the provisions of the Affordable Care Act — federal tax credits to help individuals pay for insurance — works under the premise that if a household or individual has a lower income, they are entitled to lower premiums. However, as their income increases, they take more responsibility for their costs of insurance, making their premiums rise with income level.

Smolnisky said that the 2014 insurance exchange subsidies will only be in place for those that are within 100-400 percent of the federal poverty level. Thus, those under 100 percent of the poverty level and above 400 percent are not eligible for the subsidies.

Without Medicaid expansion in 2014,

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South Dakota

Panel Nixes Bill To Keep Guns From Mentally Ill

BY NATHAN JOHNSON
nathan.johnson@yankton.net

PIERRE — An attempt to prohibit individuals involuntarily committed to a psychiatric hospital and deemed a danger to others from having firearms was rejected in a South Dakota House committee Tuesday.

While supporters said House Bill 1188 was a narrowly-crafted piece of legislation that protected the rights of the mentally ill and would make the state safer, opponents worried that it represented government overreach and

provided no real benefits.

House Minority Leader Rep. Bernie Hunhoff, D-Yankton, along with Yankton attorney David Hosmer, testified in favor of the bill before the House Health and Human Services Committee. Other entities supporting the bill through testimony included the South Dakota Department of Social Services, the South Dakota Sheriff's Association



Hunhoff

and the South Dakota Unified Judicial System.

Testifying against the bill was the South Dakota chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

In addition to preventing those who have been involuntarily committed to a facility for treatment of mental illness and found to be a danger for others from owning or buying guns, the bill would also have allowed the names of those individuals to be added to a national database that is checked when someone tries to buy a gun.

Hunhoff said Hosmer recommended

the pursuit of such legislation after the Newtown, Conn., school shooting in December and helped to craft the proposed law. South Dakota is one of approximately 19 states that do not submit information about dangerous mentally ill residents to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), a registry that is checked when someone tries to buy a gun. However, the state does send the names of people ineligible to buy guns because

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DUETS

David and Theresa Barnes of the Yankton High School orchestra perform a violin duet during the Yankton Winter Orchestra Concert, held at the YHS/Summit Activities Center theatre Tuesday night. Besides the YHS orchestra, the Yankton Middle School sixth grade orchestra and the grades 7-8 orchestra performed a variety of pieces ranging from Johann Strauss's "The Blue Danube" to Jimi Hendrix's "Purple Haze." To see or purchase images from this event, visit spotted.yankton.net. (Kelly Hertz/P&D)



TransCanada:

XL Pipeline Would Not Affect Climate

BY MATTHEW DALY
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a shift in strategy, the company that wants to build an oil pipeline from western Canada to Texas said Tuesday that the project will have no measurable effect on global warming.

Alex Pourbaix, TransCanada's president for energy and oil pipelines, said opponents of the proposed Keystone XL pipeline have grossly inflated its likely impact on emissions of greenhouse gases that

contribute to global warming.

Canada represents just 2 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, Pourbaix said at a forum sponsored by a manufacturing group that supports the pipeline. Oil sands concentrated in Alberta, where the 1,700-mile pipeline would start, make up 5 percent of Canada's total, Pourbaix said.

"Simple math tells us, therefore, that the oil sands represent only one-tenth of 1 percent of global greenhouse emissions," he said. "Even if production from the oil

sands were to double, the (greenhouse gas) contribution from the oil sands would be immaterial to global" greenhouse gas production.

Pourbaix's comments came two days after a rally Sunday by pipeline opponents drew an estimated 35,000 people to Washington. Organizers, including the Sierra Club and other environmental groups, billed the event as the largest climate rally in U.S. history. Thousands of people marched past the White House to