

Pipeline Foes File 2 New Lawsuits

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Opponents of the Keystone XL pipeline in Nebraska have filed two new lawsuits after the state's Supreme Court threw out a legal challenge last week. Landowners in Holt and York counties filed lawsuits Friday against pipeline developer TransCanada to stop the Canadian company from using eminent domain power to gain access to their land. Their attorney, Dave Domina, says the lawsuits closely resemble the claim that the court dismissed. But this time, he says all of the landowners have legal standing to bring the case. The lawsuits seek to overturn a law that allowed former Gov. Dave Heineman to approve the pipeline's route. Four of the court's seven judges declared the law unconstitutional, but five were required. Three refused to address whether it was constitutional, saying the landowners lacked standing.

Sheriff Fined \$3,000 After Hiring Wife

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A Nebraska sheriff who gave his wife a department job has agreed to pay a \$3,000 fine for violating state disclosure rules. Merrick County Sheriff Kevin Campbell acknowledged in a settlement released Friday that he hired his wife part-time in August 2011, and was employing her full-time by August 2012. Campbell was fined by the Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure Commission for not filing a disclosure notice with the county clerk. The commission says he also failed to advertise the job as required when it became a full-time position. Campbell says the violations were unintentional, but he accepts responsibility. He says the first disclosure filing was mistakenly sent to the county attorney instead of the clerk, and he didn't realize he had to advertise again when the job became full-time.

Ricketts Appoints Chief Operating Officer

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts has appointed the president of TD Ameritrade Clearing Inc. to serve as the state's first chief operating officer. Ricketts announced Friday that Felix Davidson will fill the new position. Davidson has been president of TD Ameritrade Clearing Inc. since 2007. He previously held managerial roles for the company's investor services and brokerage operations divisions. Ricketts is a former TD Ameritrade executive. He served six years as a captain in the U.S. Marine Corps and graduated from the University of Nebraska. The governor's office says Davidson will focus on new business and technology strategies with the governor and agency directors. Former Nebraska Govs. Charley Thone and Mike Johanns also created new staff positions in the office. Davidson will begin Feb. 2.

Neb. Beef Exports Set New Record

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska's beef exports have reached an all-time high as the state saw a significant increase in overseas sales. The state's Department of Agriculture said Friday that the approximately \$1 billion worth of beef purchased by foreign buyers through November sets a new record. Ag Director Greg Ibach says markets such as Japan, Hong Kong and South Korea have increased Nebraska beef purchases over the past six years. The state has conducted trade promotions in each of these countries. The Omaha World-Herald reports muscle meat exports have more than tripled since 2009. Exports of beef products generally not favored in the United States, such as beef livers and tongues, have grown as well.

New Budget Forecasts Predict A \$12.8 Million Deficit In 2018

BY JAMES NORD
Associated Press

PIERRE — South Dakota could have a \$12.8 million budget deficit in fiscal year 2018, according to new long-range budget forecasts released Friday by Gov. Dennis Daugaard's administration. The projections are part of Daugaard's quest to improve the state's rating among credit rating agencies and aimed at giving lawmakers a look past the budget cycle at hand when making financial decisions. "It'll be a very good tool I think to create policy discussion," Daugaard said. Under the projections, tax receipts are expected to grow from \$1.476 billion in fiscal year 2014 to \$1.548 billion in

fiscal year 2018. But spending is expected to grow from \$1.466 billion to \$1.561 billion in the same period. Daugaard said the projected deficit is "something we're going to have to adjust to." The estimates are based on historical information, financial data and modeling. Joint Appropriations Committee Chairman Justin Cronin said the projections will help lawmakers plan better. He said looking years ahead is prudent and will allow lawmakers to make necessary changes in the appropriations process. "I think we need to take the positive steps involved to make sure we're not there," Cronin said of the projected shortfall.

South Dakota officials recently met with credit rating agencies in New York. Bureau of Finance and Management Commissioner Jason Dilges told lawmakers at a Friday hearing that the agencies praised South Dakota's debt level, which is lower than the state limit and is projected to remain that way through fiscal year 2018. House Speaker Dean Wink said he is "proud of the financial situation we're in." But he said the agencies are looking for a commitment from the state to continue longer-range financial forecasting into the future. South Dakota's credit rating with the three main agencies is a step away from the highest level. Daugaard said his goal of the highest bond rating will bring down interest costs for borrowing.

Iowa Wooing Omaha-Based Insurer Woodmen Of The World

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — State and local officials in Nebraska are trying to counter Iowa's efforts to lure Woodmen of the World and its 400 headquarters jobs away from Omaha. Marty Bilek, Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert's chief of staff, told the Omaha World-Herald that Stothert is concerned about the potential loss of jobs and a longtime corporate citizen. "The conversations are serious — if for no other reason, they involve people at the highest levels of government on both sides of the river," Bilek said. Council Bluffs, Iowa, officials approached Woodmen of the World Life Insurance Society last spring, after the insurer was denied a county property tax exemption that's still under appeal. Woodmen's lawyers argued that the insurer is a fraternal benefit organization exempt from federal taxes and is a charity that's eligible for local tax exemption as well. The company reported \$40 million

in charitable giving last fiscal year. Douglas County lawyers said Woodmen is primarily an insurance company, citing its \$1.2 billion of gross revenue in 2013. Woodmen spokeswoman Jill Register told the newspaper that no formal deal has been struck, but "there is still ongoing dialogue with the state of Iowa." She also said Woodmen is talking to Nebraska officials. "I'm sure that they are interested in keeping us here," she said. "We have a lot to offer a state, not only from a business standpoint but from the money we give back to communities." Moving Woodmen to Iowa could be attractive, Register said, because of its "favorable business incentives and laws" and its appreciation for "the value that we bring, especially the 400 jobs." Economic development officials for both states said Woodmen hasn't been awarded any tax incentives, but they would not say whether there are any negotiations.

Senators Seek To Capitalize On Nebraska Wind Energy

BY ANNA GRONWOLD
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — A group of Nebraska senators on Friday announced proposals aimed at boosting the state's wind energy production by offering tax incentives and reducing regulations for developers. The announcement follows a report prepared for the Nebraska Power Review Board that estimated the state could generate at least 2,000 more megawatts of renewable energy under the existing transmission system. The American Wind Energy Association ranks Nebraska fourth in the nation for wind energy resources, but the state still lags in the nationwide market. "Nebraska has the wind resources to meet our needs, and we need to capitalize on what's left over from that by exporting to other states," Sen. Jeremy Nordquist of Omaha said at a news conference Friday morning. Nordquist unveiled a bill that would create a production tax credit for renewable energy facilities, replacing a federal tax credit of 2.3 cents

per kilowatt-hour that expired in December. Oklahoma and Iowa offer similar credits. The bill offers 1.5 cents for each kilowatt-hour of electricity. The measure would draw developers to rural communities and could help to relieve the property tax burden in small communities, Nordquist said. Sen. Ken Haar, of Malcolm, announced a measure to remove some regulations on construction of renewable energy facilities, including a requirement that developers demonstrate a facility won't create a liability for public power utilities. "We export no wind, in fact, we import some wind energy at this point," Haar said. Nordquist said the proposals aim to eliminate barriers that he says are keeping Nebraska from achieving its potential when it comes to wind energy. Sen. Al Davis of Hyannis also announced a bill that would extend the tax evaluation policy that applies to wind energy to other renewable energy sources, such as solar, biomass or landfill.

Award

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"I am honored," Austin said about the award. "I am being awarded for a job that I enjoy every minute of." Austin has been teaching at Beresford Elementary School for 40 years. "It has always been kindergarten and it has always been here," she chuckled. "Over half the parents in my class, I also had in kindergarten." For the last 12 years, Austin's classes have sung at local Veterans Day programs. Starting at the beginning of the year, Austin teaches one patriotic song a week to her kindergartners. "I play the piano and lead everyone in singing," she said. "It has been kind of a tradition now that the kindergartners sing every year. By Veterans Day, they know the songs very well." Austin said that besides doing the program at the school, the kindergartners also go to the local nursing homes to perform for the residents. "We see a lot of the veterans there," she said. "They just get tears in their eyes because these kids at this young age already know these songs. I think if they don't learn them now, they won't." Austin also has her students write letters to area soldiers. "They are doing so much for us and for America and working so hard," she said. "Just to get letters from their hometown — they really appreciate it." Austin said that though she does these patriotic teaching as a dedication to all veterans, there is one veteran in particular that all of this is for: Her father.

"My dad was a World War II veteran," she said. "He passed away young — this is just kind of a tribute to him, too." Austin grew up in Center-ville, just 10 miles away from where she teaches now. There, she attended a country school growing up. "When I was in first grade, there were only two of us. And for the rest of my grades I was all by myself," she said. It was when she was in grade school that she developed the love for teaching and music. "When I was a little girl, I always played school," Austin said. "I started playing piano when I was just a young girl and it was only 50 cents a lesson from my mother's friend." After high school, Austin went to South Dakota State University for child development. "I then got married and transferred to the University of South Dakota where I finished my teaching degree," she said. Austin first started as a teacher in Beresford in 1975. "I worked in a trailer house by myself," she said. "There used to be three trailer houses on our south campus and now there are two gyms and a high school. It's just amazing all the changes that have happened." Besides the location, there has been many other changes in Austin's education career at Beresford, such as the curriculum. "What they used to teach in first grade we now teach in kindergarten," she said. "It's not all play like it used to be. We have a lot of academics, art, reading and writing," she said. But, according to Austin, the kids have adjusted very well. "They are just so excited to learn and they mature so much during the year," she said. "They are just like sponges. They learn so quickly and are just so lovable."

Austin said her favorite part of the day is seeing how excited and happy her students are to be at school in the morning. "It's always, 'What are we going to do today?'" she said. "They just want to come to school and to learn. I just love being here and being with the kids and the other teachers that I work with. We have a very good school system here." Austin said that though teaching may not be the most high-paying job, it may be the most fulfilling. "Just seeing the accomplishments that the kids make and the love and respect the chil-

dren have for you as a teacher is just so rewarding," she said. "You are so important in their lives." Even after 40 years, Austin said that she is just as excited to come to school every morning as her kindergartners. "I have enjoyed every single minute of it and I don't know when I'll ever retire," Austin said with a smile. "I still love what I am doing." Follow Jordynne at twitter.com/hartjordynne. Discuss this story at yankton.net.

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