

# Nebraska Gun Advocates, Opponents Argue Over New Bills

BY ANNA GRONEWOLD  
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Nebraska gun-control advocates and opponents are squaring off on a series of new measures in the Legislature.

The Judiciary Committee heard testimony Thursday on three pieces of legislation that would expand gun owner rights and one that would limit reckless firing.

Amanda Gailey of Nebraskans Against Gun Violence testified against a measure by Sen. Bill Kitner of Papillion that would allow people with concealed carry permits to store a gun in their vehicle while at work. The current law allows employers to prohibit employees from bringing guns on business property.

Gailey said the measure prioritizes

gun owners' convenience over public safety. But Rod Moeller of the Nebraska Firearm Owners Association said the bill aims to balance property rights of business owners and personal rights of individuals.

"At what point do we stop worrying about private right of the employee and give those up to the employer?" Moeller said.

Moeller also testified in support of a bill by Sen. Dave Bloomfield of Hoskins to allow spouses of military members and immigrants living legally in the U.S. to qualify under the residency requirement for a concealed carry permit.

A bill by Susan Ebke would allow members of a private school's security team to carry guns.

"The right answer is not one size fits all. Administrators know the school better than I do, better than you do, sena-

tors. LB135 would give them an additional option," said Lincoln attorney and Nebraska Firearm Owners Association board member Dick Clark.

Opponents said the eight-hour course required to obtain concealed and carry permit does not qualify members of a security team to handle weapons around children.

"Children need protection from foolish, simple-minded adults who want to play with guns," said committee member Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha, an opponent of gun proliferation.

Chambers said in "a gun-happy state" he was happy to see a bill by Sen. Jerry Johnson of Wahoo that would increase penalties for reckless shooting near buildings or property in smaller towns. The penalties are higher in Omaha and Lincoln.

# Where Bald Eagles Feed During The Minnesota Winter

BY KATY READ

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When Minnesota's bald eagles head south for the winter, they don't go far. Like the hardy Northerners they are, they're content to bask in the less-than-balmy breezes along the Mississippi River in southeastern Minnesota, which on the day these photos were taken had cooled the air, already struggling to reach zero degrees, to a 20-below wind-chill.

Birds don't migrate for warmth but for food, said Scott Mehus, education director of the National Eagle Center in Wabasha, Minn. And eagles from northern Minnesota, as well as Wisconsin and even Canada, head toward stretches of open water on the river to enjoy what Mehus calls a "floating buffet line."

It's a buffet of eagle-style sushi: dead fish that float down the Mississippi under the ice and then bob to the surface of a 5-mile stretch of water that always stays open. The main course is tiny gizzard shad — fish "so small you can hardly see them," Mehus said. "The eagles grab them with their feet and eat them on the fly."

Thanks to a blood-chilling mechanism involving the veins in their feet, eagles don't mind standing for hours on the edge of ice, peering into the water for these tidbits.

Still, Mehus noted, "everybody likes fresh fish" now and then. In winter, eagles get theirs by harassing ducks that dive underwater for live fish. It's basically a mugging; eagles have been known to eat actual ducks, so the ducks are pretty quick to hand over their catches instead.

Eagles can be spotted along the river from Red Wing, where these photos were taken, on south. Reads Land-



DAVID JOLIS/MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE/TNS

An immature bald eagle grabs a fish from the water Wednesday, on the Mississippi River in Red Wing, Minnesota.

ing near Wabasha is a particularly good viewing area, some days drawing hundreds of eagles, Mehus said. Even slower days bring 10 or 20.

He's especially grateful for their presence considering how close they came to disappearing altogether.

In the early 1960s, the population of bald eagles in the Lower 48 states had dwindled alarmingly. By 1968, only one nesting pair remained along more than 300 miles of river from Red Wing to Rock Island, Ill.

"We came very close to losing this bird, this magnificent symbol of our country," Mehus said.

The culprit? DDT, Mehus said. The

then-popular insecticide kills bugs but then climbs the food chain; when it gets to eagles it weakens the shells of their eggs. Mother and father eagles would sit on the eggs (eagles share this parenting duty) and inadvertently crush their offspring.

DDT was banned in 1972. By 2007, the bald eagle came off the endangered species list. Nesting pairs in the Lower 48 states have climbed from 417 in the 1960s to over 10,000.

Minnesota leads with 2,300. As for the stretch of river that once held only one nest, Mehus said, "you could safely say there are over 350 on that same stretch today."

# Lawmakers Seek Trailer Exemption From Wheel Taxes

BY BOB MERCER  
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — A bipartisan group of South Dakota lawmakers is trying to make trailers exempt from county wheel taxes.

Sen. Betty Olson, R-Prairie City, is leading the effort. She is prime sponsor of Senate Bill 79. It would allow counties to exempt trailers from the tax, which already is optional.

State law limits the wheel tax to maximums of \$4 per wheel and \$16 per vehicle.

Olson's lead sponsor in the House of Representatives is Rep. Mike Verchio, R-Hill City. He is the House Transportation Committee chairman.

The net effect might be more counties adopting a wheel tax if people don't have to pay on trailers, especially those infrequently used.

• ELECTION REFORMS: The Senate approved random sampling of petition signatures for candidates seeking election to statewide offices.

The vote Thursday was 34-0 for Senate Bill 68. It now heads to the House of Representatives for consideration.

"It's a good protection for the state, for elections," Sen. Ried Holien, R-Water-town, said.

A related piece of election legislation, Senate Bill 67, was held over for action today (Friday).

• WORD PUZZLE: Fourteen Republicans, led by

Rep. Jim Bolin of Canton, took an unusual step by submitting a concurrent resolution that draws a distinction between fees and taxes.

HCR 1001 offers these words of wisdom:

"(A) tax is a compulsory financial contribution levied by a government for the general support of the government and the services it provides; and (A) fee is a charge levied by a government on specific persons, activities, or properties as payment for a direct benefit received."

• DON'T BLINK: Without debate, five people received Senate confirmation Thursday of their reappointments to two important state-government panels by the governor.

Senators allowed the five to be approved on the consent calendar that provides near-automatic approval.

The five included John Calvin of Watertown, Tony Klein of Pierre and Greg Heineman of Sioux Falls to the state Board of Economic Development; and Ron Wheeler of Deadwood and Dana Dykhouse of Sioux Falls to the South Dakota Science and Technology Authority.

In a separate action, the Senate voted 34-0 for confirmation of the appointment of Joseph Schartz to the state Board of Regents.

Schartz, of Humboldt, is the student regent. He attends South Dakota State University. Remarks came from Sen. Jason Frerichs, D-Wilmot.

# Program Aims To Help American Indian Students

RAPID CITY (AP) — Seven South Dakota colleges and universities are launching a program this summer aimed at helping American Indian students to stay on track and complete an engineering, science or math degree.

The state's six public universities and Oglala Lakota College are using \$3.6 million in federal funds to begin the Jump Start program, with a goal of helping 900 students.

The program will help students with issues such as culture shock, financial hardship and fear of leaving home. Each campus will have a full-time adviser to provide students with personal and educational support throughout college.

Some lower-income students don't understand the long hours it takes to study technical subjects and cope with pressure, said Carter Kerk, an industrial engineering professor at the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology in Rapid City.

"You really have to take a step up from high school," he told the *Rapid City Journal*. "Maybe their parents didn't go to college, they don't have a good model for what it takes to be successful in college. They are not

ready for it, so they will come in the first year and spin their wheels."

About 35 students will come to the Mines campus in August, a month before the start of regular classes, to take an intensive four-week, for-credit course. They also will be connected with a part-time campus job, according to Multicultural Affairs Director Jesse Herrera.

Fourth-year civil engineering student Adonnis Martinez, who is Native American, said neither of his parents attended college and he had to teach himself how to budget time for homework. Martinez said he has friends who performed well at high school but couldn't cope at college.

"They start to struggle and think they can't recover," he said.

Herrera said the adviser on the Mines campus will be checking on Jump Start students every week or two to make sure they are going to class and keeping up with their coursework, even knocking on their dormitory doors if necessary.

"It will be very intrusive," he said. "We don't want students to fall off the radar. If they miss a class, someone will know."

# SD Legislators Gather To Remember

PIERRE (AP) — South Dakota legislators paused briefly to remember eight former colleagues who died in 2014. Lawmakers met on Thursday in the state House of Representatives chamber for the annual legislative memorial service.

Speaking during the proceedings, Sen. Mike Vehle praised his fallen colleagues for serving to make a difference in the lives of South Dakotans.

The eight were all state representatives: Robert Johnson, of Groton; James Jones, of Miller; Charles Mickel, of Rapid City; Ralph Nachtigal, of Platte; Ben Radcliffe, of Huron; and Rodney Gutzler, Wallace Myers and Greg Peterson, of Sioux Falls.

# Group Helps Pilger By Building Houses

PILGER, Neb. (AP) — Up to 450 volunteers will be coming to northeast Nebraska as part of a Mennonite effort to help Pilger (PIHL'-gur) recover from the tornado that destroyed much of the town last June.

The *Norfolk Daily News* reports that the Mennonite Disaster Service wants to construct five houses in six months, using rotating teams of 18 to 24 people who will journey to Pilger from all over the United States and Canada.

Jeff Koller is the group's disaster response coordinator for the western U.S., and he says the first crew is expected to arrive Feb. 1 at the group's base station at the City Auditorium in Norfolk. The workers will occupy the office space in the auditorium, which still will be available for other uses.

# Sheriff Suspends Crime Lab Director

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The Douglas County crime lab director has been suspended and an investigation has been ordered for several cases handled by the lab.

The *Omaha World-Herald* reports that Sheriff Tim Dunning put Tracey Ray on paid leave in October, and then on Jan. 6 suspended her without pay for 30 days. She's appealing her suspension to the Douglas County Civil Service Commission.

A letter from Douglas County Chief Deputy Sheriff Tom Wheeler to Ray's attorneys says a status review of cases she was working on "brought to light several potential issues involving the improper handling of evidence, to include packaging, labeling, storage and security."

Ray was hired in 2010 after former crime lab chief David Kofeed's conviction for planting evidence in a Cass County double murder.

# Rounds Tapped To Head Panel

PIERRE (AP) — South Dakota U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds' spot on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee has turned into a leadership position on one of the sub-panels organized under the committee.

Round's office announced Wednesday that South Dakota's junior senator will chair the Subcommittee on Superfund, Waste Management and Regulatory Oversight.

The former governor says the post includes oversight of the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers.

Rounds campaigned on loosening regulatory burdens on business. He says his role on the subcommittee will attempt to address deficiencies in President Barack Obama's agencies.

# SD Teachers Get National Certification

PIERRE (AP) — Two South Dakota teachers have made the grade themselves and achieved National Board Certification.

Sarah Gross teaches mathematics to early adolescents in the Rapid City Area School District and Jody Neugebauer is a generalist/early childhood teacher in the Garretson School District northeast of Sioux Falls.

They're among more than 4,000 elementary and secondary school teachers nationwide to achieve certification in 2014 and 106 educators in South Dakota who have done it.

State Education Secretary Melody Schopp says the certification process is rigorous and includes a comprehensive look at their instructional practices and a commitment to continual improvement.

Three other South Dakota teachers renewed their National Board Certificates: Ellen Cooch of Spearfish School District, Vikki Hasche from Arlington School District and Nichole Melius of Faulkton Area School District.

# SF Woman Sold Synthetic Marijuana

SIoux FALLS (AP) — A Sioux Falls woman accused of selling synthetic marijuana as a manager of several stores has pleaded guilty.

Gwen Pike pleaded guilty to conspiracy to distribute a controlled substance. The charge carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison.

Pike began working in September 2011 at Roll With It, a Sioux Falls store that sold synthetic marijuana. According to court documents, she was instructed by business owners and managers to tell customers that the substances weren't for human consumption. The documents say Pike trained employees to use similar language when she became a manager.

The *Argus Leader* reports employees knew the products were being used as drugs, but thought the disclaimer would allow them to avoid criminal responsibility for distribution.

Sentencing for Pike is scheduled on April 20.

# Youth Coach Accused Of Child Sex Abuse

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Police have arrested a Lincoln youth baseball coach following accusations he sexually abused a 12-year-old boy during private training lessons.

Prosecutors charged 33-year-old Jeff A. Hawks on Tuesday with third-degree sexual assault of a child.

Investigators say the child told them Hawks inappropriately touched him outside his clothing while they were alone during their sessions between August and December. Hawks' attorney declined to comment to the *Lincoln Journal Star*.

Hawks recently served as board president of Lincoln Sox Baseball and has been involved with the organization for about three years.

The group's vice president says it's investigating the matter. He says Hawks is no longer involved with the organization.



Hummel-LaBounty

Valerie Sue Hummel of Evanston, IL, and Seth Richard LaBounty of Wilmore, KY, announce their engagement and upcoming marriage. Parents of the couple are Randy and Carla Hummel of Utica, SD and David and Rachael LaBounty of Mitchell, NE.

The bride-elect is a 2010 graduate from Yankton High School in Yankton, SD, and a 2014 graduate of Dakota Wesleyan University with a bachelors degree in Religion and Psychology. She is currently a student at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, IL.

The groom-elect is a 2007 graduate of Mitchell High School in Mitchell, NE, and a 2011 graduate of Dakota Wesleyan University with a bachelors degree in Religion. He is currently a student at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, KY.

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