

**Committee Hears Bill To Attract Teachers**

PIERRE (AP) — A legislative panel has approved a measure aimed at addressing South Dakota's rural teacher shortage by covering college tuition for professionals already working in such schools.

The House Appropriations Committee on Friday approved a proposal to offer tuition assistance to certain school employees to get teaching degrees in South Dakota if they agree to return to their school for five years.

But the committee de-funded the proposal's \$1.5 million price tag to keep the measure alive and potentially finance it later.

The bill's main sponsor is Republican Rep. Thomas Holmes of Sioux Falls. He says that many times rural schools hire a teacher who leaves after a year.

The proposal would allow up to 40 teachers-in-training a year and is modeled after a different state scholarship program.

**Lawmakers To Vote On Marriage Fee**

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A proposal to raise the fee for marriage licenses in Nebraska is headed to a first-round vote in the Legislature next week.

Lawmakers ended their debate on the bill Friday before reaching a vote. Speaker of the Legislature Galen Hadley says they'll likely decide the issue on Monday.

Opponents say the proposed increase from \$15 to \$50 amounts to a tax increase of more than 300 percent for couples getting hitched. Some senators have proposed amendments to lower the increase.

Sen. Kathy Campbell of Lincoln has said the current \$15 fee doesn't cover the cost of collecting and filing marriage licenses.

Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha says the proposal is a small way of encroaching on the public.

**SD Man Gets 60 Years For Robbery**

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — A 21-year-old man who planned a drug robbery that left a former business partner dead has been sentenced to 60 years in prison.

Kevin Rice, of Dell Rapids, was sentenced Friday morning in Sioux Falls. Rice pleaded guilty to first-degree manslaughter in July for his role in the robbery plot against 20-year-old Jordan LeBeau.

Rice admitted to showing Watertown teens Brian Anderson and Trevor Kruthoff where LeBeau lived. He also admitted to giving them the handgun used in the murder.

**Brown Wants Bar Raised For Ballot-Issue Petitions**

BY BOB MERCER  
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — Sen. Corey Brown, R-Gettysburg, wants to increase the signatures of registered voters necessary for an initiated measure or a referendum.

Brown introduced Senate Bill 166. It would straighten out some current confusion.

The individual specific laws for a petition and for a referendum require 5 percent of the qualified electors.

Those would remain in place under Brown's proposal. He wants to change another law from the same chapter. It currently states:

"The total number of votes cast for Governor at the last preceding gubernatorial election, shall for the purposes of this chapter, be the basis for determining the number of petitioners required."

Brown wants to repeal that sentence and replace it with this sentence:

"For purposes of this chapter, qualified electors shall mean the total registered voters eligible to cast a ballot for Governor in the preceding gubernatorial election as determined by the secretary of state."

The change would nearly double the signatures needed.

**WHOOPS**

There appears to be an oversight in Brown's bill. The title refers only to initiated measures. He said Friday he wants it to apply to referendums too.

"I'll need to fix that," he said. His proposal has already set off a

howl among various activists who see ballot measures as an effective way for groups to pass laws or stop laws.

South Dakota Democrats, who are a super-minority in the Legislature, have used ballot measures effectively in recent years.

They stopped Republicans' education package known as HB 1234 and the governor's tax-refund program for large business projects in the 2012 election.

And they won a vote to increase the state's minimum wage in the 2014 election.

**NEW CHALLENGE**

John Bastian of Belle Fourche, who retired in 2013 from everyday duty as a state circuit judge, won state Senate confirmation Friday to the state Board of Regents.

The vote was 32-0 in support of Gov. Dennis Daugaard's selection of Bastian. The regents govern South Dakota's state university system and specialty schools for the deaf and the visually impaired.

Sen. Alan Solano, R-Rapid City, said Bastian is a U.S. Air Force veteran, worked for nearly a decade as a lawyer on the state attorney general's staff, and has been a circuit judge for more than 20 years.

Solano said Bastian still serves as a judge when needed in three circuits. He described Bastian as a courteous, well-prepared intelligent person.

Sen. Art Rusch, R-Vermillion, is a retired circuit judge who said he's known

Bastian for many years. "I know him as a bright and conscientious, hard-working judge," Rusch said.

Rusch also joked that it's good to find things for retired judges to do.

**RELATED NOTE**

The Senate's pattern this year has been holding roll-call votes on regent appointments but using the consent calendar to approve other appointments by the governor.

Three were on the consent calendar Friday.

Senators approved appointment of Myron Williams of Wall and reappointment of Bart Blum of Reliance to the state Brand Board; and reappointment of Don Kirkegaard of Sturgis to the state Board of Education.

**DEAL MAKER**

Sen. Betty Olson, R-Prairie City, withdrew her legislation Friday that sought card-keys for all 105 lawmakers to the tunnels between the state Capitol building and other state buildings.

In return, she said, she received a promise from state Public Safety Security Trevor Jones that two card-keys would be made available to legislators through the Highway Patrol security office in the Capitol and the Legislature's leaders would receive card-keys.

**LOOKING AHEAD**

The Legislature doesn't meet Monday, Feb. 2, and works a four-day week.

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