

MIDWEST DIGEST

Counterfeit Cash

Passing In Nebraska

(AP)— Counterfeit cash is showing up in eastern and south-central Nebraska.

At least three reports have been received by Kearney police, and Cass County authorities say at least six counterfeit bills were passed through businesses in Murray, Plattsmouth and Weeping Water since Saturday. Kearney Police Sgt. Mike Young says the bad bills aren't hard to spot because the paper doesn't feel quite right and the portrait isn't distinct.

Cass County Sheriff William Brueggemann says the \$20s and a \$10 that turned up in his county are bad reproductions and that most people handling money could easily identify the bills as counterfeit.

Omaha To Hold Gun Amnesty Collection

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Omaha police will hold another amnesty day in hopes of getting more guns off the streets.

The gun collection is scheduled for 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday near 30th and Spencer streets in north Omaha.

Under the program, anyone can drop off any gun with police — no questions asked.

The city held its first gun amnesty collection last month in south Omaha. Police collected 30 guns and three cases of ammunition.

Family, Friends To Send Off Neb. Soldiers

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Friends and family members will gather to say goodbye to about 300 Nebraska National Guard soldiers who are deploying to support operations in Iraq.

The farewell ceremony will be held Sunday morning at Lincoln's Seacrest Field. Lt. Gov. Rick Sheehy and other officials are expected to attend the send-off.

The members of the Lincoln-based 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade will go through training at Fort Lewis, Wash., before deploying overseas. Their mission is expected to last one year.

The Nebraska National Guard says about half the soldiers have already been deployed at least once before.

Former Neb. Deputy Sentenced For Porn

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A former northeast Nebraska sheriff's deputy has been sentenced to five years in federal prison for receiving child pornography.

The U.S. Attorney's office in Omaha says 26-year-old Brandon Cole of Pender was sentenced Friday in U.S. District Court in Omaha.

Authorities say Cole was a Thurston County Sheriff's deputy when his roommate, also a sheriff's deputy, discovered child pornography on Cole's home computer. The roommate reported his findings to the Thurston County sheriff, and the Nebraska State Patrol was asked to investigate.

Investigators say a search of Cole's computer and laptop turned up six videos of child pornography and 25 still images — some of girls under 14.

Health Alerts Posted At Two Neb. Lakes

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska authorities have issued a health alert for toxic blue-green algae at Red Willow Reservoir in Frontier County and have continued an alert at Johnson Lake in Gosper County.

Also on Friday, the state issued an alert at Swan Creek Lake 5A near Tobias in Saline County, because the toxin level had dropped below allowable maximums.

The algae, which scientists say are plantlike bacteria, are common in freshwater. Some types can produce dangerous toxins.

People can still camp, fish and boat on lakes under the alert but should not have full-body contact.

Drinking toxin-tainted water can cause vomiting, diarrhea, respiratory failure and, rarely, death.

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Neb. Court Removes Judge, Cites Misconduct

BY JOSH FUNK

Associated Press Writer

OMAHA, Neb. — The Nebraska Supreme Court ordered the removal of a longtime county judge on Friday because he tried to influence cases involving a coach and player on his daughter's softball team.

The high court agreed with the Nebraska Commission on Judicial Qualifications, which suggested ousting Lincoln County Judge Kent Florum. The judge, who admitted to improper behavior, has been on the bench for 19 years with no indication of other wrongdoing.

Florum has 10 days to ask for a rehearing before the court issues a mandate enforcing its removal order.

A complaint filed last year accused the judge of improperly involving himself in two cases between March and July 2008.

One involved North Platte teacher and softball coach Sharon Kramer, who was accused of stealing from a high school booster club concession stand, and the other a softball player facing criminal charges.

Florum, who helped coach the team, recused himself from both cases. But court documents say he asked a prosecutor if charges against Kramer could be dropped, suggested she be sentenced without an open hearing and threatened a school board member.

In the softball player's case, Florum told a prosecutor to "take care of my shortstop" and contacted the assigned caseworker several times, the documents said.

"There is no excuse for the respondent's conduct, and it is hard to imagine conduct that, coming from a judge, could be more damaging to the reputation of

the judiciary," the court said in its ruling.

Florum was not in his office Friday, and his lawyer, Susan Kirchmann, did not immediately respond to a message Friday morning. Kirchmann has said Florum intended to be involved in the cases as a private citizen and assistant softball coach, not as a judge.

It does not appear that Friday's ruling would have an immediate impact on Florum's law license because the state's Council for Discipline would have to pursue its own case against Florum before his law license would be affected.

The court said the facts of Florum's misconduct are largely undisputed because he admitted the improper behavior, so it needed only to decide whether suspension or removal was appropriate. Justices ruled that Florum's behavior was egregious and prolonged enough to warrant removal.

Court documents said Florum made statements to lawyers and others demonstrating his interest in the outcome of the cases even after recusing himself.

According to the ruling, Florum asked a prosecutor whether the charges against Kramer could be dropped in favor of restitution and suggested means for Kramer to plead and be sentenced without an open court appearance.

The court said Florum also threatened a school board member, who was an attorney, out of concern that Kramer's conviction jeopardized her teaching position with North Platte High School. Florum told the school board member that he would be "making an enemy he doesn't want to make."

Florum also contacted the caseworker assigned to the softball player's case several times, telling her he was "talking to her" as a softball coach, not a judge.

Neb. Tax Revenue In June Comes In Short

BY NATE JENKINS

Associated Press Writer

LINCOLN, Neb. — Nebraska tax revenue dove in June, falling 10 percent below official projections after May figures seemed to signal an economic rebound, according to a report issued Friday.

Net tax revenue for all four categories of state taxes lagged projections including sales taxes — a measure of how much consumers are spending, said the report for June by the state Department of Revenue. Sales tax revenue was nearly \$11 million below projections for the month.

"June receipts are further evidence of a bumpy road to a broad economic recovery," Gov. Dave Heineman said in a statement.

Already sluggish tax receipts were further dented by higher-than-projected tax refunds primarily given to businesses under the state's job-growth policies.

The refunds were 16 percent higher than projected, totaling \$57 million for the month.

Gross, corporate income tax revenue was the lone bright spot in the report, exceeding the official revenue forecast that sets the baseline for the state budget by nearly 13 percent. But after refunds were added, net corporate taxes were nearly 8 percent below the forecast.

Altogether, the state ended the fiscal year with \$76.4 million less than what was projected by the Nebraska Economic Forecasting Advisory Board in February. The board needs again this fall to revise its revenue projections.

State Sen. John Wightman of Lexington, who is on a committee that considers whether to recommend special legislative sessions on budget issues, said Friday that a special session doesn't currently appear necessary, but that could change based on future revenue figures.

Another member of the committee who is also chairman of the state's budget-writing Appropriations Committee agreed a special session wasn't needed now, adding that the state doesn't have cash-flow problems and likely won't because of a 3 percent cushion built into the state budget.

"It'd have to start to get pretty ugly," for that cushion to be insufficient, said Sen. Lavon Heidemann of Elk Creek. If it was, the state could lean on a cash reserve account.

At least one state senator believes a special session is needed to get a head start on spending cuts before lawmakers craft the next two-year budget during the regular session that starts in January. The state could have to close a budget gap during that two-year cycle of roughly \$680 million.

"The longer we go without solving this, it only makes next year's budget problem worse," said Sen. Heath Mello of Omaha.

Former Dem. Candidate Pleads Guilty To Charges

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A former Sioux Falls attorney and Democratic legislative candidate who led police on a chase in May has pleaded guilty to drunken driving, fleeing police and embezzlement.

Mary Ann Giebink, 50, on Thursday told the judge that she had written at least \$4,800 in checks from the client trust account at Galland Law Firm. Giebink said she wrote checks to herself, her husband, her business and a Sioux Falls bar between April 9 and May 4.

"I gambled, your honor," Giebink said.

The former District 10 candidate for the state House withdrew from the race and closed her law firm after a police chase May 7 that reached speeds of up to 100 mph through a rural Sioux Falls

neighborhood and ended when she drove into a ditch.

Giebink also had faced a drug charge that prosecutors dropped in exchange for her guilty pleas on other charges.

Giebink tendered her resignation to the State Bar within days of her arrest and officially was disbarred May 20. She faces up to 13 years in prison on the criminal charges. A sentencing date was not immediately set.

Judge Larry Long lowered Giebink's bond from \$5,000 to \$1,000 so she could pay former employees for their last weeks of work.

Giebink told Long she had put money back into the client trust account since her arrest and promised to pay any additional restitution.



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