

MIDWEST DIGEST

Southeast Technical Might Ban Tobacco

SIoux FALLS (AP) — Southeast Technical Institute is considering making its campus tobacco-free.

The Sioux Falls School Board, which oversees STI, is to vote on the policy Aug. 9.

Smoking already is prohibited indoors. The change would rid the campus of the designated smoking areas near some entrances. Smoking in cars on STI property also would not be allowed.

Chelsea Pickner-Carlson, a student and a smoker, says she sees no need to get rid of the smoking stations. She says they are designated areas, and provide a good break for smokers.

STI President Jeff Holcomb says he appreciates the argument about individual freedoms but that wellness is more important.

Delta Cuts Air Fares In Sioux Falls

SIoux FALLS (AP) — Sioux Falls' largest air carrier is temporarily cutting fares, after facing pressure from local officials and even a U.S. senator.

Airport director Dan Letellier says Sioux Falls initially was not included in a Delta nationwide fare sale, but the air carrier changed its mind.

Studies have shown that nearly half of Sioux Falls air travelers fly out of other regional airports to save money. The issue drew the attention last month of Republican Sen. John Thune, who urged both Delta and United Airlines to improve service and cut fares in Sioux Falls.

Meister To Decide If He'll Run For Neb. Gov.

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Scottsbluff trial lawyer Mike Meister will announce Monday whether he'll run for Nebraska governor.

The state Democratic Party has scheduled a press conference for 3 p.m. CT at the Scotts Bluff County courthouse. The party says that's when Meister will announce his decision.

The party has been without a gubernatorial candidate since Mark Lasker dropped out of the race earlier this month amid a campaign finance scandal.

Meister ran for attorney general in 2002 but lost to Jon Bruning, who's now seeking his second term.

The Democratic candidate will face Republican incumbent Dave Heineman in November.

Pierre Hotel Project To Get Under Way Soon

PIERRE (AP) — Work could soon begin on an \$8 million hotel and conference center project in Pierre.

Dave Sweet with Regency Management says the demolition of a restaurant and a convenience store at the site could happen within the next month.

Construction on the ClubHouse Hotel and Suites is to start this year, with the hotel and conference center opening within 12 months.

Sweet says officials also are working to secure an Italian restaurant for the facility.

Brookings Dog Owners Concerned About Park

BROOKINGS (AP) — Brookings dog owners who use the former city landfill to exercise and train their pets for hunting and competition are worried about plans to develop a nature park there.

Dog owners say they're concerned that increased use of the park by fishermen and other outdoor enthusiasts will push them out, leaving them without a place to train their dogs.

Plans call for open spaces, heavily wooded areas and four interconnected fishing ponds, some of which are stocked by the state Game, Fish and Parks Department for youth fishing.

The concern was one of the main topics of discussion at a meeting this week at City Hall.

Omaha Residents Asked To Lower Flags

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Mayor Jim Suttle is asking Omaha residents to lower their flags to half-staff to honor an 18-year-old soldier from Omaha who was killed in Afghanistan.

Pfc. Edwin "Eddie" Wood died of injuries suffered July 5 when his vehicle was blasted by an improvised explosive device near Kandahar. A soldier from Virginia also died.

Wood was assigned to 1st Squadron, 71st Armor Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry), based at Fort Drum, N.Y.

His death came just a day after returning from a visit with family.

Suttle wants the flags lowered on Saturday. A funeral for Wood is scheduled that morning at Dundee Presbyterian Church in Omaha. Burial will follow in Forest Lawn Cemetery.

Neb. State Patrol Warns Of Online Car Scam

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — The Nebraska State Patrol is warning state residents of a scam being carried out through fake car sale ads on the online classifieds site Craigslist.

The patrol says the scam has vehicles listed for sale by out-of-state owners. Several Nebraskans have filed complaints saying they've sent payment for the vehicles, only to discover that neither the vehicles nor the owners exist.

Patrol investigators say those placing the ads appear to be Nigerian scam artists operating overseas.

Patrol auto fraud investigator Gene True says several victims in Nebraska are out a lot of money, and because the scammers are out of the country, "there are very few options for prosecution."

Markets Taking Electronic Payments

PIERRE (AP) — South Dakota agriculture officials say the use of electronic payments at the state's nearly three dozen farmers markets is growing.

Acting Agriculture Secretary Jon Farris says by giving customers additional payment options, farmers markets are positioning themselves to grow their customer base.

Social Services Secretary Deb Bowman says the payment option provides healthier food choices for those in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

Vermillion Area Farmers Market Board President Rebecca Terk says electronic payment option allow SNAP recipients on a smaller cash food budget to make larger purchases of fresh fruits and vegetables.

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Neb. Orders Furloughs To Save \$3.5M

BY NATE JENKINS
Associated Press Writer

LINCOLN, Neb. — Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman on Friday ordered more than 11,000 state employees covered by union contracts to take two furlough days by the end of year, a move he says is needed "to avert as many layoffs as possible."

Heineman pointed to state revenues that lagged official projections by \$76 million in the fiscal year that just ended, and worries revenues may fall short again this year, when ordering the furloughs. He said the furloughs will save the state about \$3.5 million.

"As a result of the downturn in revenue and in order to avert as many layoffs as possible, it is prudent for the state to take additional action now," Heineman said in an e-

mail to state employees. "Wages represent the largest cost for most agencies, and it is necessary to implement employee furloughs as the next appropriate step."

The state is facing its worst budget crisis in recent memory, with lawmakers bracing for a slash-and-burn legislative session next year when they may have to close a two-year budget gap of roughly \$680 million.

Julie Dake Abel, director of the union covering about 10,600 of the more than 11,000 employees who will have to take furlough days, said employees weren't happy with the decision.

"But if this does save some jobs, furloughs certainly are preferable" to layoffs, she said. The state hasn't said how many jobs might be spared by the move, nor how many total layoffs there might be, she said.

Heineman spokeswoman Jen Rae Hein said those figures can't be predicted.

In June, union employees rejected Heineman's request to freeze their pay. Heineman said at the time that that rejection could cause hundreds of layoffs, and furloughs. A pay freeze would have saved roughly \$15 million to \$20 million.

Approximately 3,000 managers not covered by union contracts will have their pay frozen this fiscal year, which began July 1, saving almost \$6 million.

Dake Abel said furloughs will siphon money from the sluggish economy and that Heineman and lawmakers need to consider increasing revenues, such as by increasing taxes on the rich.

Heineman has said repeatedly taxes should not be increased and there is little appetite in the Legislature to do so.

'Barefoot Bandit' Heading To Wash.

BY CURT ANDERSON
AP Legal Affairs Writer

MIAMI — Without saying a word, the teenager accused in a two-year string of sometimes shoeless burglaries and other crimes that helped him gain international notoriety as the "Barefoot Bandit" agreed Friday to return to Washington state to face federal charges.

Hector Dopico, an assistant federal public defender temporarily representing 19-year-old Colton Harris-Moore, told a federal judge that Harris-Moore waived his right to a hearing on whether he should be transferred to Seattle. U.S. Magistrate Judge Robert Dube said Harris-Moore would be handed over to the U.S. Marshals Service, which will handle his travel.

The U.S. Marshals office in Seattle said the timing of Harris-Moore's return would depend on how soon the marshals could line up a flight for him. It could be as soon as next week or three to four weeks from now, said spokesman David Miller.

Dopico also said he had been in contact with an attorney who will represent Harris-Moore in Seattle, but he did not name that lawyer. Harris-Moore's mother has asked Seattle defense attorney John Henry Browne to represent her son.

Harris-Moore, clad in the typical tan jail jumpsuit, shackled at the wrists and ankles and wearing socks and sandals, said nothing during the brief hearing. Dopico said a bail hearing would likely be held in the coming weeks in federal court in Seattle.

The teen is suspected in about 70 crimes in nine states

and British Columbia, some allegedly committed shoeless. He was first arrested at age 12 and had been on the lam since escaping in 2008 from a halfway house.

Authorities say Harris-Moore stole an airplane from an Indiana airport and flew it to the Bahamas. They say he then commandeered a boat in a potential attempt to reach the more remote Turks and Caicos Islands and eventually hide in Cuba. But it all ended Sunday when police shot out the engine of Harris-Moore's boat and took him into custody.

In addition to the worldwide media attention, Harris-Moore has become a folk hero to many, with his Facebook page listing more than 89,000 friends who frequently post messages of encouragement for his antics.

"You had a good run n now it's over but the legacy will live on your still gonna be a hero ta me stay strong," read one such posting Friday.

But another posting is less sympathetic: "No where to run baby ... no where to hide."

When he reaches Seattle, Harris-Moore will face a criminal complaint charging him with interstate transport of stolen property for allegedly stealing an aircraft from Idaho in 2009 and crash-landing it in Washington. Other arrest warrants charge him with fleeing prosecution and other crimes.

He is accused of crimes in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Wyoming, South Dakota, Nebraska and Iowa.

At several crime scenes the FBI found bare footprints identified as those of Harris-Moore, according to court documents.

'Aerial Ballet' Of Planes To Open Special Olympics

BY NATE JENKINS
Associated Press Writer

LINCOLN, Neb. — About 160 planes will land in rapid succession Saturday at a Nebraska airport as pilots, including actor Harrison Ford, ferry in hundreds of athletes for the Special Olympics' national games.

About 800 athletes from 28 states will be flown in on private, business-style planes that will land about every two minutes at the airport in Lincoln. The intricate airlift — which took about two years to organize — will help open the games and be one of the largest air-travel events ever in Nebraska.

The event will showcase an "amazing, complex set of logistics," Jack Pelton, CEO of Cessna Aircraft Co., said Friday. "It's almost like an aircraft ballet on the ground."

Cessna officials had hoped

for more volunteers to fly athletes into Lincoln, but economic woes pared the number of them able to help. Four years ago when the Special Olympics USA National Games were held in Iowa, 235 planes carrying athletes landed in Des Moines.

Ford, an avid pilot, was among those not grounded by the bad economy. He'll fly athletes into Lincoln from Santa Monica, Calif.

Although most athletes won't be riding in the plane of a famous movie star, many athletes are likely to remember the flight as a special event.

"For these athletes, it can quite often be their first flight," said Pelton, whose company orchestrated the airlift.

The Special Olympics officially opens Sunday and runs through Friday. It will feature 13 sporting competitions for nearly 3,000 athletes from 49 states.

Ethanol Industry Scrambles To Keep Gov. Subsidies

BY MARY CLARE JALONICK
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — The once-popular ethanol industry is scrambling to hold onto billions of dollars in government subsidies, fighting an increasing public skepticism of the corn-based fuel and wariness from lawmakers who may divert the money to other priorities.

The industry itself can't agree on how to persuade Congress to keep the subsidies, which now come in the form of tax credits worth about \$6 billion annually.

One industry group, Growth Energy, made the bold move Thursday of calling for the tax credits to be phased out completely in favor of spending the money on more flex-fuel cars and gasoline pumps that support ethanol. A rival group, the Renewable Fuels Association, said it's too late in the year to make such proposals — the tax credits expire at the end of the year, and legislative days are numbered.

As the industry bickers over what to do, Congress is signaling it's growing tired of paying for ethanol. The House Ways and Means Committee is considering slashing the tax credit by 9 cents a gallon, from 45 cents to 36 cents, when it looks at a wide range of energy tax credits as early as next week. That would be the second cut in the credit in as many years.

A key senator also expressed skepticism this week. Democratic Sen. Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico, chairman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee and a longtime supporter of renewable fuels, said Congress should "weigh all factors, including the credit's very high cost to taxpayers," when looking to extend the credit.

Bingaman noted that the ethanol industry is protected by congressional mandates for its use.

Some supporters say they see the writing on the wall.

"The longer we have this support structure in place for ethanol, the more people begin to question it," said Roger Johnson, president of the National Farmers Union, which supports Growth Energy's plan. He says a new approach is needed as the public becomes more skeptical.

The tax credits still have strong supporters on Capitol Hill and in the Obama administration. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said Thursday that the administration remains committed to tax incentives supporting biofuels like

ethanol. Rep. Earl Pomeroy, D-N.D., a member of the Ways and Means Committee, is leading the fight in the House to keep the tax credits.

Pomeroy says that the 9-cent cut is a good starting point and that he feels optimistic after discussing the issue with fellow committee members and members of the ethanol industry this week.

He acknowledges that the legislative environment is challenging and says that a simple extension of the credit makes the most sense in the House. "Late in the legislative session, simpler is easier," he said.

Iowa Sen. Charles Grassley, the top Republican on the Finance Committee that will consider the tax, said he is also working to get it extended. He noted that the lapse of a tax credit for makers of biodiesel has already hurt that industry.

Ethanol producers say expiration of the tax credits, which are paid to oil companies as an incentive to blend gasoline with ethanol, could mean the loss of almost 40 percent of its plants and tougher times for a domestic fuel that is good for national security.

Critics say the industry should stand on its own after receiving subsidies for 30 years and argue the tax credits are a waste of taxpayer dollars. A diverse coalition of groups has argued over the past few years that the increase in production of corn and its diversion for ethanol is making animal feed more expensive, raising prices at the grocery store and tearing up the land.

Craig Cox of the Environmental Working Group, one of the organizations opposing the fuel, says he thinks the industry "hit a wall" in Congress as concern over budget deficits have increased.

Growth Energy, a group formed in 2008 as some ethanol companies grew worried that their political clout was waning, said it is proposing the phase-out as a way to think more creatively about boosting the industry and the fuel. The group says ethanol helps reduce the nation's dependence on foreign oil, pointing to the Gulf oil spill as a reason to turn to the corn-based alternative.

The industry was also frustrated last month by a delay by the Environmental Protection Agency in deciding whether U.S. car engines can handle higher concentrations of ethanol in gasoline. But the increase in the maximum blend is expected to be approved later this year.



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