

## Company To Expand Broadband Services In SD

PIERRE (AP) — The third-largest telecommunications company in the United States says it plans to invest at least \$5 million over the next several years to expand its broadband services in South Dakota.

CenturyLink says it is focusing on expanding the availability of broadband and improving connection speeds now that the merger with Qwest Communications International is complete. The two companies merged in April and began operating under the CenturyLink name.

CenturyLink's General Manager for South Dakota Julie Darrington says in a news release that she and others are studying where the best locations in the state are to expand coverage.

## Omaha's Qwest Center Gets New Name

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Omaha's Qwest Center is now the CenturyLink Center.

The name of the arena and convention center officially changed on Friday, but it could be awhile before all the signs are changed.

KETV-TV in Omaha says officials with CenturyLink and the Metropolitan Entertainment and Convention Authority say it's more than just a name on a building, it's about building a strong partnership. The naming rights agreement runs through September 2018.

Earlier this year, CenturyLink Inc., of Monroe, La., completed a \$12 billion acquisition of Qwest Communications to become the third largest telecommunications company in the United States.

## SD Indian Tribe Closer To Expanding Gaming

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — The Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe is one step closer to getting 100 new gaming machines at its Royal River Casino.

The *Argus Leader* reports that a public hearing that took place Friday morning at the Moody County Courthouse was a key step in ratifying a new tribal gaming compact negotiated between the tribe and Gov. Dennis Daugaard.

The agreement now goes to the Secretary of the Interior for approval. The secretary has 45 days to act on it.

If approved, the tribe plans to buy 100 new machines by late October. Tribe President Anthony Reider says each machine will cost \$20,000.

## Mayor's Firing Power Under Scrutiny In Winner

WINNER (AP) — A Winner man filed petition signatures Thursday to force an election on the mayor's firing power.

John Meyer needed 94 signatures and filed 261.

If enough of the signatures are valid, the city must hold an election over an ordinance approved last month by the City Council. The ordinance would strip the mayor of the power to fire various department heads without council approval.

Deputy Finance Officer Rhonda Augspurger tells the *Daily Republic* she will use a state online database to validate petition signatures.

If enough are valid, the council will have 10 days to decide when to hold the election. In the meantime, the ordinance would not go into effect.

## State Museum Director Leaving For Wyoming

PIERRE (AP) — The director of the South Dakota State Historical Society museum is leaving to take a similar position in Wyoming.

Helen B. Louise's last day at the Cultural Heritage Center is July 22. She starts as manager of the Wyoming State Museum in Cheyenne on Aug. 8.

In a news release, Louise says that during her four years as director, the museum was able to diversify and increase the exhibition program and outreach in the state.

She says she's proud of the work her staff of three people did during her time there.

# Midwest Flooding Causes Rail Delays

BY GRANT SCHULTE

Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Disruption caused by Midwest flooding has inundated Amtrak with delays and extra expense this summer while dampening the spirits of passengers traveling popular routes, forcing them in some cases to hop off the train and onto chartered buses.

Amtrak's Empire Builder, its most popular cross-country route, normally takes travelers from Chicago through the Rocky Mountains before heading to the Northwest. But for several weeks, westbound riders have gone no further than St. Paul, Minn.

Riders on the California Zephyr fare better, but eastbound riders stopping at Omaha on the San Francisco-to-Chicago line must hop off in Lincoln and ride a bus for an hour.

"These are the worst weeks of disruption I've seen in my 10 years at Amtrak," said Marc Magliari, a Chicago-based regional spokesman. "It's the longest I can recall routes ever having this kind of service interruption. I've seen flooding, but never for this long."

Some good news arrived Thursday: The full eastbound Empire Builder route will re-open Sunday, after more than a month of service suspensions. Westbound trains will leave Chicago for Portland and Washington starting Monday.

But passenger losses have still eaten into an otherwise strong year.

June ridership on the Empire Builder was down to 23,721 passengers, a 53 percent drop compared to ridership in June 2010, Amtrak statistics show. California Zephyr ridership from Chicago to San Francisco fell more than 19 per-

cent last month, to 30,450. Overall ridership on Amtrak's long-distance lines grew more than 4 percent in the same period.

Amtrak says its overall projected ridership is expected to exceed 30 million passengers, a new all-time high, when its fiscal year ends Sept. 30.

Flooding around the Empire Builder line forced a 1,000-mile stretch of track to close between St. Paul, Minn., and north-central Montana. The full line runs from Chicago to Washington, then forks into Seattle and Portland. Without the Empire Builder, any passenger wanting to ride from Illinois to Montana would get rerouted — through California.

In a statement, Amtrak General Superintendent Daryl Pesce said no one within the train service could remember as much flooding or disruption in the line's 82-year history. Amtrak said the route was restored after Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway, which owns the line, repaired tracks damaged by the flood. The station and boarding platform at Minot, N.D., remain closed.

Magliari said Amtrak is shouldering the costs of employee overtime and charter buses. He said the federally owned rail corporation expects an undetermined amount of financial losses.

Flooding along the Missouri River has disrupted routes in Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota, North Dakota and Montana. To the south, Magliari said, the regional Missouri River Runner has suspended round-trip service and now skips five cities between St. Louis and Kansas City.

Amtrak's line through Nebraska and Iowa,

the California Zephyr, has chartered buses for Omaha-bound passengers since a Missouri River flood barrier forced the route to close last month. Eastbound riders are boarding the bus in Lincoln, and westbound passengers switch rides in the southwest Iowa town of Creston.

Jack Pycior rolled into Lincoln at 3:57 a.m. Wednesday aboard an Amtrak train that should have arrived around midnight. The ride left Chicago's Union Station at 2 p.m. the previous day.

"The delays are usually a couple hours," Pycior said, dragging his suitcase toward the parking lot. "But not four hours."

Neil Blomquist and his wife, Monica, arrived at an Amtrak station in Grand Junction, Colo., last month expecting a low-stress train ride to a late-night dinner in Salt Lake City. Then the vacationing couple got some bad news: Midwest flooding had delayed their ride at Omaha. The train was running 10 hours late.

Blomquist said he canceled their tickets and rented a car. His wife, who had happily anticipated a scenic ride, cried when she learned the news.

"We ended up being able to do it, but we had to scramble," Blomquist said. "It was no longer a non-stressful trip."

Flooding has created an "unprecedented challenge" for Amtrak and caused congestion on many of the nation's rail lines, said Sean Jeans-Gail, a spokesman for the Washington-based National Association of Railroad Passengers. Jeans-Gail said flood-induced track closures this summer likely will continue to cause delays, but "there's nothing Amtrak really can do about it."

# Report: Nebraska Crime Down 2 Percent In 2010

BY GRANT SCHULTE

Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Crime declined in Nebraska last year, as in the rest of the U.S., although the state saw more murders, forcible rapes and aggravated assaults, a state commission reported Friday.

Even so, its executive director said the increases were small enough that there was no cause for alarm.

The number of crimes reported to law enforcement agencies dropped from 53,098 in 2009 to 52,152 in 2010, a 2 percent decrease, according to the yearly analysis by the Nebraska Crime Commission. Reports of violent crime declined about 1 percent, even though the number of reported rapes, aggravated assaults and murder cases grew. Murder and manslaughter cases, which were lumped together, in-

creased 29 percent to 53 cases reported statewide.

The number of forcible rapes reported grew 8 percent to about 630, which marked a five-year high. Aggravated assaults increased by 3 percent to almost 3,140. Nationally, the numbers of those crimes dropped. Michael Behm, the commission's executive director, said the Nebraska numbers weren't "necessarily alarming, but they still did increase."

The statistics compiled by the state are used in the Federal Bureau of Investigation's annual Uniform Crime Report, a tally of crimes documented nationwide. While state and local law enforcement agencies keep their own statistics, the Nebraska-wide review can highlight problem areas and help agencies secure grants for extra enforcement, Behm said. For law enforcement and prosecutors, its "kind of a report

card of what's going on in Nebraska," he said.

Crime in Omaha decreased 5 percent, with 19,718 offenses reported last year. Lincoln saw a 3 percent increase, to 11,480 crimes reported.

Patsy Martin, a spokeswoman for Voices of Hope, a Lincoln-based crisis and counseling service, said the rape statistics are difficult to interpret. The rise in reported cases could simply mean that more sex-assault victims are contacting authorities, she said.

"That's the tricky thing about sexual assaults," Martin said. "It's one of the most under-reported crimes. But I think the only conclusion you can really draw is that more people are reporting. If more people are reporting, that can almost be a good thing."

Robberies decreased 16 percent, perhaps because the econ-

omy is improving and people are less desperate, Behm said.

Property crimes fell 2 percent, driven by declines in the number of burglaries, larceny-thefts and arsons. Motor vehicle thefts increased 3 percent.

The number of arrests statewide dropped 6 percent to 83,860 in 2010. More than one-third involved liquor law violations, drug abuse and driving-under-the-influence cases.

Driving-under-the-influence cases accounted for the most arrests, more than 12,600. Gov. Dave Heineman signed legislation in May that will expand the use of ignition-based breath sensors for people accused of drunken driving, clamp down on intoxicated boating and make drunken driving with a child a standalone crime. The bill by Speaker of the Legislature Mike Flood, LB 667, is set to take effect Jan. 1.

# Conviction Upheld For Man Killing Mother

BY MARGERY A. BECK

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — The Nebraska Supreme Court upheld on Friday the murder conviction and long prison sentence of an Omaha man who threw his mother off the balcony of her fourth-story apartment.

Stephen Pullens was sentenced to 80 years to life in prison after being convicted of second-degree murder in the December 2004 death of his 73-year-old mother, Matsolonia Myers.

Pullens, 50, had argued that a Douglas County District Court erred by, among other things, allowing hearsay evidence that Pullens had previously threatened to throw his mother from her balcony. That evidence consisted of testimony during Pullens' trial from Myers' ex-husband, that Myers had told him Pullens had threatened to kill her during a visit in 2000.

The ex-husband, Lawrence Kenneth Myers, testified that Myers detailed how Pullens had lifted her up onto the balcony and had threatened to throw her over before eventually dropping her to the floor and leaving. Prosecutors showed that Myers had obtained a protection order against Pullens soon after that incident.

Nebraska's Supreme Court said in its opinion that the district court judge was right to allow the hearsay to show purposes of intent and motive by Pullens.

"It is commonly held that prior threats or attacks by the defendant upon the victim may be relevant not to show a general propensity toward violence, but, rather, to demonstrate the nature of the relationship between the victim and the defendant and the defendant's feelings toward the victim," the high court wrote. "This, in turn, may demonstrate proper purposes of intent, motive, and absence of mistake or accident."

Supreme Court Judge William Connolly dissented, saying the hearsay unfairly hurt Pullens' credibility with the jury.

"After the jury heard evidence of Pullens' propensity to attack Matsolonia, he had a dead cat hanging around his neck, and the lingering odor would have permeated the jury room," Connolly wrote. "Because Pullens' credibility was crucial to his defense, permitting the state to attack his

character with unnecessary extrinsic acts should not be considered harmless error."

The high court also rejected Pullens' assertion that the lower court erred by allowing into evidence emails he sent to an Omaha police detective after he fled to California and Switzerland. Some of the emails detailed Pullens' mother's death and his anger at her gambling, and one admitted to throwing his mother from the balcony.

Pullens had argued that prosecutors had not proved that he wrote the emails.

The public defender for Pullens, Tim Burns, called the ruling disappointing and noted Connolly's dissent.

"We thought there were some substantial issues there," Burns said. "This pretty much is the end of his direct line of attack."

Pullens could still pursue post-conviction relief, Burns said.

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