

Ricketts Defends Donation To Death Penalty Petition

BY GRANT SCHULTE
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Gov. Pete Ricketts defended his \$100,000 donation to a group that is trying to save Nebraska's death penalty, saying Wednesday that he may give more in the future.

Ricketts said he feels strongly that voters should decide the fate of the death penalty, which was abolished by lawmakers in May despite his veto.

"All Nebraskans, including myself, wish we lived in a world where we didn't have to have a death penalty," Ricketts said. "But the fact of the matter is we do have dangerous criminals."

Ricketts and his father, TD Ameritrade founder Joe Ricketts, each contributed

\$100,000 to the petition drive that seeks to put the death penalty question on the 2016 ballot. The Republican governor said he didn't consider his donation inappropriate because the fate of the death penalty would rest with voters if the question makes it to the ballot.

The group, Nebraskans for the Death Penalty, raised a total of nearly \$244,000 in its latest reporting period, from June 2 to June 25. The group said it has spent nearly \$217,600, leaving it with about \$26,300 in cash on hand.

Death penalty opponents have launched their own campaign, Nebraskans for Public Safety, urging voters not to sign the petition. The group announced a \$400,000 donation last month from the Proteus Action League, a Massachusetts-based group that

has spent millions to finance death penalty repeal efforts.

Nebraskans for Public Safety also received about \$6,000 worth of staff time, office space and legal services from the ACLU of Nebraska, according to state disclosure records. The group spent more than \$50,000 on television ad buys and paid \$100,000 to Fieldworks, a Washington-based consulting firm that helped with last year's ballot campaign to increase the minimum wage.

Nebraskans for the Death Penalty has to gather roughly 57,000 signatures of registered voters by Aug. 27 to place the question on the ballot, and 115,000 to suspend the law before a vote. They also must gather signatures from at least 5 percent of the registered voters in 38 of Nebraska's 93 counties.

Crop Acres Change Pace In SD

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — South Dakota farmers this year have planted more wheat but less corn and soybeans.

The Agriculture Department says in its annual acreage report that spring wheat, winter wheat and durum wheat acres all are up this year in South Dakota, while soybean acres are down 1 percent and corn acres are down 10 percent.

South Dakota farmers also planted more oil sunflowers, oats, barley and flaxseed than last year. Acres of sorghum, proso millet, dry beans and alfalfa hay were unchanged

Changes Effect SD Driver's Licenses

PIERRE (AP) — Several changes to South Dakota's commercial driver licensing program will go into effect Wednesday.

The new regulations raise the minimum age to apply for a commercial driver's license from 16 to 18. They also set a 14-day waiting period from the date a commercial learner's permit is issued to the date the applicant is able to take the commercial driver's license driving test.

The changes were approved by lawmakers during this year's session. The rule changes are meant to keep the state in compliance with federal regulations.

Jane Schrank is the director of the state's Driver Licensing Program. Schrank says that non-compliance could have resulted in the loss of millions of dollars in federal funds. Additional regulation changes are available online.

GFP Adjusts Tags For Antelope And Fall Turkey Hunts

BY BOB MERCER
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — Hunters will have slightly more opportunities to kill antelope in some parts of South Dakota but fewer chances to take wild turkeys in the Black Hills this fall.

The state Game, Fish and Parks Commission set the numbers of tags for the two species Wednesday.

The commissioners declined however to close the fall turkey season in the Black Hills as some hunters had suggested.

The commission instead agreed to offer 400 fall turkey tags for resident hunters and 32 for non-resident hunters for the Black Hills.

That means 350 fewer licenses for residents and 28 fewer licenses for non-residents.

Hunters took only 100 toms and 114 hens during the 2014 fall season in the Black Hills. As recently as 2010 they killed 907 toms and 646 hens.

Hunters reported seeing fewer turkeys in the Black Hills last year.

Then May and June rains were twice the normal amounts this spring in the Black Hills.

Heavy precipitation makes it easier for fox and other predators to find turkey nests, according to GFP biologist Chad Lehman.

"Turkeys are big. They stink. When they get wet, they give off more stink," Lehman said.

Anecdotal sightings in recent weeks found approximately one or two poult per hen, compared with an average of about four poults per hen a year ago, he said.

Lehman cautioned that data is very preliminary at this point.

For the East River fall turkey season, the commission added 100 tags for resident hunters. There will be 835 single-tag licenses and 50 two-tag licenses.

The West River season will again have unlimited tags.

The antelope season will have a total

of 2,945 tags. That is an increase from 2,705 last year.

There were about 80,000 antelope at the species' recent peak less than a decade ago, according to Chad Lindbloom, a GFP senior big game biologist.

The estimate for this year is 33,900. "We've seen the decreases across the board," Lindbloom said.

Some units in central South Dakota will be closed.

Hunters killed 1,770 bucks and 314 does and fawns in the 2014 season. Four years earlier, they killed 3,932 bucks and 5,017 does and fawns.

For a while it was difficult to keep abreast of the antelope population's growth, Lindbloom said. Then nature stormed in — literally.

"We couldn't have predicted three hard winters back to back in our pronghorn range," he said. "Old man winter helped us out, just a little more than we wanted."

New Law Changes Take Place In SD

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — The start of the state's new fiscal year Wednesday also meant a slew of new laws kicking in. Some of the more notable:

NO MORE "DASCHLE LAW"

Lawmakers repealed the so-called "Daschle law" that barred a presidential candidate from seeking another office on the same South Dakota ballot.

Under the new law, for example, a current state senator can seek re-election while also seeking the presidency.

That undoes a law passed in 2002 — a GOP-backed measure that was criticized by Democrats at the time for targeting Sen. Tom Daschle as he weighed a 2004 presidential bid.

BREASTFEEDING IN PUBLIC

Nursing mothers can now breastfeed their children in any public or private location in South Dakota as long as they follow other state and local laws.

Breastfeeding advocates had argued the practice should be protected in the state.

Nursing mothers must still obey state and municipal laws, mostly aimed at public decency. However, no municipality may outright ban breastfeeding in public places.

WEAPONS FOR MILITARY SPOUSES

Spouses of military personnel with permanent residency in South Dakota, but posted elsewhere, can now apply for a South Dakota permit to carry a concealed weapon in the roughly 25 states that have reciprocity. The permit would be necessary if they visited South Dakota and wanted to carry a firearm.

Before Wednesday, the law only extended those benefits to serving military personnel, not their spouses.

South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley proposed the measure, citing the case of a man who moved to Germany with his wife, who was serving in the military. The man wanted to renew his permit and potentially carry a weapon in South Dakota if he returned on vacation, but couldn't fulfill the 30-day state residency requirement because he was overseas.

EXTRA GAMBLING OPTIONS

Casinos in the historic Black Hills town of Dead-

wood can now offer keno, craps and roulette.

The new games were overwhelmingly approved by South Dakota voters in November and authorized by lawmakers this year.

Casinos and residents hope the new games will attract younger gamblers, as well as those who might otherwise have gone to Colorado or Iowa to seek out the games.

Deadwood officials have estimated the new games could bring as much as \$2 million a year. They also

tout other benefits, such as increased spending on other games by gamblers who might not otherwise come.

BIKE PASSING

In a nod to cyclist safety, drivers now have to give bikers a 3- to 6-foot buffer when passing.

It's 3 feet with the speed limit 35 mph or below, 6 feet when the limit is above that.

At least 25 other states require the 3-foot cushion.



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