

Nebraska

Lawmakers Study School Aid's Impact On Taxes

BY GRANT SCHULTE
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Nebraska lawmakers are once again looking to lower property taxes, but this time they're turning to the single largest expense on landowners' tax bills: school funding. Senators will launch a review of the state's school-aid formula next month to consider new funding options, including a possible boost in state aid or new revenue sources that would allow school districts to lower their levies.

The study is a joint effort of the Legislature's Education and Revenue committees, which will convene in hopes of creating new proposals for next year's session.

The effort includes both urban and rural senators, who have traditionally been at odds over school funding, and a "facilitator" with mediation experience who will help senators try to reach an agreement.

"All of us are going to have to come into this with different expectations," said Sen. Kate Sullivan of Cedar Rapids, chairwoman of the Education Committee and a member of the Revenue Committee. "From my personal standpoint, I'm hopeful that we can end up with some legislation introduced. I think we have committee members that are committed to working on this."

Nebraska's school aid formula distributes money by calculating a school's needs and subtracting what it can generate through local property taxes and a few other sources. The difference between a district's needs and its local resources determines how much state "equalization" aid it receives.

The funding dispute revolves around larger districts with fast-growing student enrollment but slow-growing property values, and smaller districts with sluggish growth or shrinking numbers. The smaller districts often have an abundance of valuable land, but agriculture groups say farmers and ranchers are shouldering an unfairly large share of the costs. Smaller schools also face higher costs to transport students and recruit teachers, who are in demand in Omaha, Lincoln and bordering states.

Nebraska Farm Bureau President Steve Nelson said the state should consider incomes as well as property values when distributing school aid. Agricultural property values may have soared to record highs, he said, but farmers now face falling incomes because of lower commodity prices.

"Funding schools is very important, but we're looking for a balance in who pays," Nelson said. "Right now, that balance weighs heavily on property owners."

Sen. Al Davis of Hyannis said he doesn't see a way to lower rural property taxes without a new revenue source such as state aid or a local income tax similar to one he proposed earlier this year. The legislation went nowhere, though, and Davis said he expects another struggle to pass major reforms.

"I'd like to be optimistic, but I'm not particularly optimistic," said Davis, a Revenue Committee member. "There are a lot of entrenched interests that are going to fight for their exemptions and tax breaks. In order to fix the problem, we need a united front that comes out of this study."

Senators are also reviewing a 1990

law that promised to lower property taxes by increasing the state's sales and income taxes and funneling the extra money into K-12 schools.

The law guaranteed that each district would receive back 20 percent of the income taxes its residents paid to the state, but said that revenue was gradually steered away from schools. It also faced heavy resistance from former Republican Gov. Kay Orr, who vetoed the tax increase, and opponents tried unsuccessfully to repeal the law through a statewide referendum.

Any major property tax reductions will likely require an increase in K-12 school funding, said Renee Fry, executive director of the OpenSky Policy Institute, a Lincoln-based tax policy think tank.

A 2014 report by the OpenSky Policy Institute found that Nebraska's K-12 public schools rely more heavily on local taxes for funding than nearly every other state. Nebraska ranked 49th in the percentage of school funding provided by state government in fiscal 2012, the most recent year available.

"It's something we've been grappling with for decades," Fry said. "I think that now, with skyrocketing ag land values, there's a heightened sense of urgency felt by the ag community."

Fry said state spending on education has declined as a share of the total economy, which forced districts to rely more on property taxes. She said schools are also more likely to put money into their cash reserves instead of returning it to taxpayers because the amount of aid they receive each year is difficult to predict.

Bird-Flu Farming Victims Have Questions

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Poultry farmers who lost millions of chickens and turkeys to the bird flu this spring are facing an uncertain future.

The *Des Moines Register* reports the farmers aren't sure when federal officials will allow them to start rebuilding their flocks or whether enough birds will be available.

Dave Rettig, president of Rembrandt Foods in Spirit Lake, Iowa, which lost 8 million egg-laying hens, said the disease struck quickly and it could return in the fall when birds are migrating.

"It came in like a tsunami and decimated the industry," he said. "And experts expect this virus to come back in the fall. Who knows where it will go? But it could impact the entire country."

Health officials have killed roughly 42 million egg-laying chickens and 7.5 million turkeys nationwide. Most of the birds killed have been in Iowa and Minnesota, but the disease has been confirmed in 15 states, including Nebraska.

Rettig said it will take at least a year or two for the industry to rebuild flocks, and he's not sure when his business will be allowed to resume. Rembrandt Foods laid off 200 workers this spring.

"We can't bring 40 million birds back overnight. The capacity just isn't there," Rettig said.

Iowa Agriculture Secretary Bill Northey said he expects the U.S. Department of Agriculture to begin clearing the first few poultry firms to resume operations soon.

The Iowa Poultry Association says that if chickens return to farms before the end of the year, they could begin laying eggs early next year.

Demand for chickens was strong even before the bird flu hit, said Tom Jorgensen, general counsel at Hy-Line International.

"Demand for product is high, and product availability is low," he said.

Hy-Line expects demand for both chicks and breeding stock will surge quickly after farms are allowed to restart. Hy-Line ships about 100 million chicks annually.

WWI Texas Vets To Get Correct Headstone

MITCHELL (AP) — Sixty years after his death, a World War I veteran from Texas whose final resting spot is in South Dakota will soon receive the correct headstone.

Joseph Robert Ward served in the U.S. Army during WWI. He died Sept. 24, 1955, and was buried at the Grace-land Cemetery in Mitchell. Ward's grave has been marked by a small temporary headstone for 60 years.

Headstones are provided for free to some veterans. Davison County Veterans Service Officer Jessica Davidson says the Department of Veterans Affairs first denied the headstone request because there was no record of Ward's discharge.

Davidson, however, was able to get paperwork from the National Archives proving Ward's discharge. The Black Hills National Cemetery then got involved in the effort and facilitated the new headstone.

The cemetery expects to receive the new bronze-plated headstone in the coming days.

Sheriff: More Needed To Cut Jail Numbers

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — As Minnehaha County prepares to expand its overcrowded jail, the sheriff says officials should rethink who will be held in the facility.

The planned \$42.5 million facility would be full less than three years after breaking ground, said Sheriff Mike Milstead, citing a jail consultant's forecast. It will need at least 730 jail beds by 2019 to keep up with a growing population of inmates, he said.

A committee endorsed a plan last month that would see the existing 400-bed facility be expanded by 320 beds, bringing the total to 720 beds, the *Argus Leader* reported.

"We can't continue to sustain the increasing numbers of inmates needing secured jail beds without taking action," Milstead said.

But instead of requesting a larger expansion, he believes the county can do more to decrease the jail population. Milstead is among a large number of criminal justice officials who believe jails nationwide need to be reassessed for their use, especially for defendants who haven't been convicted of a crime.

A snapshot of Minnehaha County inmates late last month showed about three out of five inmates, excluding federal and other state prisoners being held at the jail, were await-

OBITUARIES

Terry Whipple Sr.

Terry G. Whipple, Sr., age 57 of Santee, NE passed away unexpectedly on Friday, July 17, 2015 at Avera Sacred Heart Hospital, Yankton, SD.

Visitations began at 8 p.m. Saturday, July 18 at the Opsahl-Kostel Funeral Home and Crematory, Yankton with an 8 p.m. prayer service. Visitations resumed at 5 p.m. Sunday, July 19 at the Oyate Oyanke Community Center, Santee, NE and continue until the time of the service on Tuesday. A prayer service will be held at 8 p.m. Sunday and Monday evenings.

Funeral services will be held at 2:00 p.m. Tuesday, July 21 at the Oyate Oyanke Community Center, Santee with burial in the Catholic Cemetery, Santee.

Terry was born July 17, 1958 in Yankton, SD to Thomas and Ruth (James) Whipple. He lived in Santee most of his life, with a few exceptions of living in Yankton, SD and Norfolk, NE before moving to Santee. Terry earned a certificate in auto mechanics from Northeast Community College, Norfolk, NE. His love of cars began leading him into the love of classic cars. Terry was also a jack of all trades. He had a heart of gold and was blessed and loved by many family and friends.

Terry is survived by his wife, Cindy of Santee, NE; son, Terry Jr. of Santee, NE; daughters, Raine and Ruth (Shiree) of Santee, NE; one special grandson, Jaidis; five more grandchildren; five sisters: Ann McBride, Vieta (Gary) Swallow, Elia (Henry) RedWing, all of Santee, NE, Roxanne (Danny) Redowl of Columbus, NE, Teresa (Nate) Gilpin of Wabeno, WI and one brother Frank (Rosella) Whipple of Santee, NE.

Terry was preceded in death by his parents; two brothers, Sonny Henry and Duane "Whip" Whipple and one sister, Darlene Henry.

Yankton Press & Dakotan
July 20, 2015

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40 Students Receive Dakota Corps Scholarships

PIERRE — Forty new South Dakota high school graduates have been awarded Dakota Corps scholarships to pursue careers in critical-need occupations within the state.

Each year, Dakota Corps recipients receive funding equivalent to the cost of tuition and applicable fees at their postsecondary institution. Once graduated, they are required to enter into a critical-need occupation in South Dakota, with terms of service equivalent to the number of years they received the scholarship, plus one year. The scholarships are supported entirely by private donations.

"By choosing careers in critical-need occupations, these students give back to our state," said Gov. Dennis Daugaard. "They will be educated in South Dakota and then remain here to provide important services and support for fellow South Dakotans. That is a win for all of us, and I thank the private businesses and non-profit organizations that recognized the importance of providing these students with scholarships."

Current occupations that qualify for Dakota Corps Scholarship support include teaching K-12 special educa-

tion; teaching high school math, science, or career and technical education; working as an accountant or auditor; working as an engineer (all fields except mining); working as a registered nurse; or working in the information technology field.

The South Dakota Board of Regents administers the Dakota Corps Scholarship program. For more information about this program, contact the board office at 1-800-874-9033 or send an e-mail to DakotaCorps@sdbor.edu.

This is a list of the 40 students who are new Dakota Corps Scholarship recipients for the 2015-2016 academic year, sorted by the postsecondary institution where they will be enrolled. The list also includes the student's hometown.

- Augustana College — Sarah House, Sioux Falls;
- Kelsey Renczykowski, Sioux Falls;
- Austin VanDerWeide, Watertown

- Black Hills State University — Avery Freidt, Rapid City
- Dakota State University — Jason Schneider, Sioux Falls
- Dakota Wesleyan University — Alyssa Roy, Mitchell
- Lake Area Technical Institute — Samantha Hansen, Aberdeen

- Northern State University — Kaylee Kappes, Aberdeen;
- Catherine Leber, Parker; Kai-

son Theis, Huron

- South Dakota School of Mines & Technology — Isaac Collins, Belle Fourche; Jacob Fleck, Hartford; Cody Hight, White River; Justin Hoff, Rapid City; Johnny Monroe, Madison; Kyle Johnson, Webster; Sarah Kelly, Rapid City; Jacob Milbrandt, Groton; Garret Odegaard, Watertown; Keagan Peters, Sioux Falls; Bennett Peterson, Holabird; Isaac Rath, Canton; Mariya Sache, Sioux Falls; Jacob Sperlich, Rapid City; Hannah Wegehaupt, Dimock

- South Dakota State University — Paige Bultena, Sioux Falls; Carter Dahl, Canton; Baylee Groos, Colman; Megan Gusso, Rapid City; Jordan Hanisch, Sioux Falls; Sierra Hartman, Brookings; Taylor Knudson, Florence; Kristina Luczak, Letcher; Logan O'Hara, Humboldt; Evan Tarrell, Sioux Falls; Rebecca Urban, Pierre; Benjamin Halbkat, Huron

- University of Sioux Falls — Connor DeJong, Watertown; Karina Ramirez, Sioux Falls
- University of South Dakota — Lucas Sternhagen, Groton

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HELP FOR THE GRIEF-STRICKEN

While most grief-stricken individuals experience many of the same emotions, grief is a deeply personal matter that affects people in different ways. In most cases, people work through their grief, which runs the gamut from shock through acceptance, over a period of weeks. However, some individuals have been known to become stuck for months or years in an otherwise normal grief cycle and are unable to move on with their lives. "Prolonged grief disorder" is a condition that is both recognized and treated by health professionals. Symptoms include suffering caused by yearning for the deceased, emotional numbness, and at least five to nine other symptoms that impair a person's ability to function. Help is available.

Your local funeral director can help family and friends locate available resources and grief recovery programs in your area. For more information, please call WINTZ & RAY FUNERAL HOME at (605) 665-3645. We are here for you when you need us, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You are invited to tour our funeral home located at 2901 Douglas Ave. Please visit us at www.wintzrayfuneralhome.com. We have been serving our community with pride for many years.

"Grief can be the garden of compassion. If you keep your heart open through everything, your pain can become your greatest ally in your life's search for love and wisdom."
Robert Ingersoll

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Honoring Their Memory

Our Thoughts And Prayers Are With Them

Our care and concern does not end with the funeral service. This week we remember with family and friends the anniversary of the deaths of:

Sharon Watkins
who passed away
July 20, 2014

Gerald Haas
who passed away
July 22, 2014

Darline Van Driel
who passed away
July 24, 2014

Dale Ugofsky
who passed away
July 24, 2014

Adolph Joe' Sejnoha
who passed away
July 26, 2014

Alice June Ellingson
who passed away
July 26, 2014

This remembrance is brought to you free of charge. If you have a loved one you would like remembered, contact us at Opsahl-Kostel Funeral Home & Crematory. Guiding and serving families with compassion and trust.

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