

DOT Reopens I-29 Dakota Dunes Exit

DAKOTA DUNES (AP) — The Dakota Dunes exit on Interstate 29 has reopened after crews have reached their goal of building protective levees around the southeastern South Dakota community. The South Dakota Department of Transportation closed Exit 1 to general traffic on May 31 to facilitate levee construction efforts in the area. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is pushing record amounts of water through the river's dams to get rid of unexpectedly heavy rains that fell last month upstream in eastern Montana and Wyoming and western North Dakota and South Dakota.

Plans For Western S.D. Wind Farm Scrapped

RAPID CITY (AP) — Black Hills Power says it is scrapping plans for a \$38 million wind farm near Belle Fourche. It had been billed as the first commercial wind project in western South Dakota. The Rapid City Journal reports that the move by the utility comes after South Dakota regulators said they did not have the authority to determine whether the project would fit under the state's voluntary renewable energy objective. That would enable Black Hills Power to raise rates to pay for the wind farm. The Public Utilities Commission says it can't make such a determination outside of a request to raise rates. Black Hills Power had not asked to raise rates.

Boy Rescued Where Another Boy Drowned

RAPID CITY (AP) — A 13-year-old boy had to be rescued from Rapid Creek in southwest South Dakota after falling in Monday afternoon. Authorities say the boy was swinging on a rope over the rushing water when he fell in and became pinned against a submerged tree. The boy's friends were able to pull him from the water before firefighters arrived for a rescue operation. He did not require medical care. Heavy rains last month swelled the creek. A 10-year-old boy drowned there, and Rapid City Mayor Alan Hanks closed the creek to recreation.

S.D. Farmers Make Spring Planting Progress

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — The planting of South Dakota crops is inching closer to the long-term average after drier weather over the past week. The Agriculture Department says in its latest crop and weather report that sorghum is now 75 percent planted and soybeans 83 percent, while the seeding of corn has virtually wrapped up. Sunflower seeding is about half done, on pace with the average. The report says weed control is becoming an issue and farmers are beginning to spray. Ranchers are busy moving cattle to pasture and haying. Range and pasture in South Dakota is rated 82 percent good to excellent.

Crews Race To Build Up Hamburg Levee

BY GRANT SCHULTE AND JOSH FUNK
Associated Press

HAMBURG, Iowa — Dozens of workers raced Tuesday to add several feet to a levee that now stands as the lone barrier between Hamburg and the floodwaters of the Missouri River that threaten to fill the small town like a bathtub. Crews working for the Army Corps of Engineers hoped to pile at least three feet of extra dirt atop the temporary levee. But time was short and the stakes were high: If the levee were to fail, parts of this southwestern Iowa community could be covered by as much as 10 feet of water within days. And the high water could linger for months. The construction work stirred up a cloud of dust as teams hurried to complete the improvements by Wednesday evening. The earthen levee became Hamburg's last line of defense after the river punched through another levee downstream in northwest Missouri that provided the town's primary protection. That failure left water gushing through a

large gap on a path to inundate the town of 1,100 — unless the other levee can be made taller. "I feel good about it," Fire Chief Dan Sturm said. "But we can't guarantee anything. We've never really had to cope with anything of this magnitude." Even though the levee breach was downstream, the floodwaters are flowing north to fill the area around Hamburg because the town sits in a valley. The fire chief compared the geography to a slowly filling bathtub. The floodwaters were initially expected to reach Hamburg on Tuesday, but the corps later said the workers would have an extra day to finish the job because the water won't reach the new levee until sometime Wednesday. The river has been rising steadily for weeks as the corps increases the amount of water released from its dams to clear out heavy spring rain and snowmelt. On Tuesday, the releases at Gavins Point Dam in South Dakota hit the maximum planned amount of 150,000 cubic feet of water per second. So officials downstream in Ne-

braska, Iowa and Missouri were sure to be watching for more levee problems. The dam releases are expected to raise the Missouri River 5 to 7 feet above flood stage in most of Nebraska and Iowa. In Missouri, the river may climb 10 feet above flood stage in some places and spill over the top of several rural levees. Parts of Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota have already seen some flooding, and officials predict the problems will linger through the summer because of the large volume of water already in the river and the larger-than-usual Rocky Mountain snowpack. The corps does not expect to reduce the amount of water released from the dams until at least August. So far, the floodwaters have covered mostly corn and soybean fields with few structures. But it's an unwelcome development for the farmers because grain supplies are at historically low levels and demand is strong for every bushel of corn and soybeans. Still, the loss of the crops is unlikely to mean much to overall U.S. production because the areas underwater are relatively small.

Neb.'s Nelson Denounces Plan To Change Medicare

BY MARGERY A. BECK
Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — U.S. Sen. Ben Nelson has endured a year and a half of bruising attacks from conservatives over his key role in the passage of President Barack Obama's health care legislation. Now, the Nebraska Democrat is fighting back with his own attack on his Republican opponent's support of a plan to overhaul the hugely popular Medicare program. Nelson sent a fundraising letter to about 11,000 households this week taking the Republican front-runner, Nebraska Attorney General Jon Bruning, to task for supporting a Republican-backed

plan to reshape Medicare, the federal health insurance fund for seniors. "Even Newt Gingrich had the honesty and decency to call the ... approach 'radical,'" Nelson wrote in the letter. "It's a cruel approach and certainly doesn't reflect what is best about America." The letter indicates Nelson plans to join a chorus of Democrats across the country hoping to play on voter concerns about the plan to recapture the House and defend their slim Senate majority in next year's elections. Nowhere is that struggle more heated than in Nebraska, where Nelson is the only Democrat in the state's five-member congress-

sional delegation. Nelson, one of the most conservative Democrats in the Senate, had largely enjoyed a cozy relationship with Republicans and the backing of voters in his heavily Republican home state. But he came under fire in December 2009, when he provided the 60th and final vote needed to move Democrats' health care overhaul measure to the full Senate, where it eventually passed. Conservatives across the country accused Nelson of betrayal, and Republicans vowed to unseat him in 2012. "I think you could argue that Nelson is the most endangered incumbent Democrat in the country," said Larry Sabato, a political

scientist and director of the University of Virginia's Center for Politics. But the Medicare plan, created by Wisconsin GOP Rep. Paul Ryan and passed by the Republican-controlled House earlier this year, has given Nelson and other Democrats a foothold with older Americans who don't want to see the program drastically altered. Ryan's plan would replace basic Medicare for anyone younger than 55 with a system in which insurance companies would offer coverage, while the government contributed toward the cost of premiums. Most benefits would not be changed for anyone who is already 55 or older.

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