

Storms Hit Midwest Amid Elections

BY BARBARA RODRIGUEZ
Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — Severe weather packing large hail and heavy rain rolled into Nebraska and Iowa on Tuesday as potentially dangerous storms targeted a swath of the Midwest, including states where voters were casting ballots in primary elections.

The National Weather Service said reports of hail damage and flooding have begun to trickle in as storms pushed into Nebraska and continued eastward.

Officials said the highest risk for severe weather was centered in parts of eastern Nebraska, western and southern Iowa, and northeast Missouri. Officials said there was the potential for a weather event called a derecho, which is a storm of strong straight-line winds spanning at least 240 miles.

"This is one of these days we can't let our guard down," said Bill Bunting, forecast operations chief at the Storm Prediction Center in

Norman, Oklahoma. "It's unfortunately panning out as we thought it would. This is shaping up as a very dangerous evening."

The outbreak of severe thunderstorms has already affected parts of northern and eastern Nebraska, where residents in Norfolk and Blair reported homes and vehicles damaged by large hail. Terry Landsvork, an observation program leader for the National Weather Service in Valley, Nebraska, said the severe weather is forecast into the evening and early hours of Wednesday.

Landsvork said on Interstate 29 north of Council Bluffs in western Iowa, more than 25 vehicles had their windows shattered by hail.

"They were driving along Interstate 29, had no place to go, and whether they were driving or pulled over, they just didn't escape the hail," he said.

Winds of up to 85 mph were also reported in some parts of Iowa. Up to 4 inches of rain was expected.

In Nebraska, weather officials said at least

one severe thunderstorm capable of producing a tornado was reported near the city of Fullerton. A similar thunderstorm was reported in the western Iowa community of Elliot. Officials say they won't be able to confirm if there were any tornadoes for several hours.

The storms also are expected to affect parts of Illinois, Kansas and South Dakota.

Heavy rain in the Omaha area has caused police to assist drivers stranded in floodwaters. Officers are also patrolling roads to replace blown off manhole covers, and officials closed Eppley Airfield airport.

"There was big ice on the ground. Nothing but ice," said Omaha resident Shuree Stephens. "It's hasn't been like this in a long time."

The bad weather had an impact on the primary elections in Iowa, where some officials and voters were forced to seek shelter in Pottawattamie County around 5 p.m. County Auditor Mary Jo Drake said opera-

tions have been suspended in about 10 precincts out of 40. There were no reports of injuries. Montgomery County closed and evacuated polls around 6 p.m.

"It's nasty here, you can't imagine," Drake said. "It's as black as the ace of spades."

Iowa Secretary of State Matt Schultz had encouraged residents to vote early due to the expected severe weather.

In South Dakota, a thunderstorm forced Senate candidate Mike Rounds, who was flying to Rapid City, to land in Pierre. Secretary of State Jason Gant said he hopes the weather doesn't hurt voter turnout, but he wants people to be safe.

The severe weather threat arrives amid an unusually quiet late spring, with far fewer documented tornados in May than in many recent years. Bunting said the current system could be most severe because of widespread straight-line winds.

"As we like to say, it doesn't have to rotate to be dangerous," he said.

Charges Dropped In Neb. Fliers Case

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A Nebraska civil liberties group on Tuesday lauded the dismissal of charges brought against a Lincoln man arrested for handing out religious pamphlets outside Lincoln's Pinnacle Bank Arena.

Misdemeanor charges of trespassing and refusal to comply with police orders against 77-year-old Larry Ball were dropped Friday at the request of Lincoln city prosecutors.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Nebraska, which has been representing Ball in the case, said the dismissal of charges was consistent with court rulings in other parts of the country.

Ball was arrested March 15 after refusing police orders to stop handing out the fliers as the Nebraska Boys State Basketball Tournament was being played inside the arena. He was released the day of his arrest after posting a \$100 bond.

Ball had faced up to six months in jail had he been convicted of the trespassing charge alone.

Police had said the arena's security staff called officers when Ball ventured beyond traffic barricades near the arena despite several warnings, but Ball insists he was on a public sidewalk and was not harassing anyone. Ball also said he didn't pressure anyone who declined to take a pamphlet.

Authorities had insisted that because the arena is managed by a private agency, he was not on public property.

The arena sits on public property owned by the city of Lincoln and the West Haymarket Joint Public Agency.

"Courts have consistently ruled that even if a public arena is managed by a private entity, it is still public property," said ACLU Nebraska attorney Joel Donahue in a written statement. "The city should welcome pamphleteers, demonstrators and others engaging in free speech activity at the arena."

John McQuinn, Lincoln's chief assistant city attorney, said Tuesday that the charges against Ball were dismissed because he had no criminal history and had not been back to the arena. But McQuinn stressed that prosecutors have the option to refile the charges.

Asked whether the charges will be refiled if Ball returns to the arena to hand out pamphlets, McQuinn declined to say.

"I can't specifically tell you the circumstances that would make us consider refiled," he said. "A violation of the ordinance again would probably be one circumstance."

Man Sentenced For Abuse 10 Years Later

SIoux FALLS (AP) — A Sioux Falls man was sentenced to three years in prison Monday for molesting a 7-year-old girl at a Charles Mix County campground nearly a decade ago.

The *Argus Leader* reports David Leiferman, 66, was initially charged with four counts of sexual contact with a child last summer for a series of incidents that took place during fishing trips at the Platte Creek Johnson Campground near Platte Creek between 2004 and 2005.

The victim revealed the abuse to her mother several years after it took place. The child and her family had moved to Oregon by then. The authorities directed the mother to refer the case to Charles Mix County.

Leiferman was indicted after testimony to a grand jury from an ex-wife and the victim, who's now 17.

Woman Robs Stores At Knifepoint

SIoux FALLS (AP) — Authorities say a woman is accused of robbing two Sioux Falls businesses at knifepoint.

Police say the woman was arrested late Monday night and no injuries were reported. Police say items that linked were linked to the robberies were found in her car at the time of arrest.

Police say the first robbery occurred at about 9:45 p.m. at a convenience store. Police say woman armed with a knife demanded money from a clerk and fled the store.

Authorities say a second robbery was reported about 45 minutes later involving a woman with a knife at a Sioux Falls Liquor store.

Responding officers came across the vehicle that matched the description of the one used in the robberies and arrested the woman.

Accused Ex-Principal: Remarks Coerced

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — The former Dickinson principal accused of setting fire to his school says his he was not read his rights prior to interviews with officers, and some of his statements were coerced.

The *Bismarck Tribune* reports that 30-year-old Thomas Sander pleaded not guilty to arson and endangering by fire. His trial is set for July 23. Sander is scheduled to appear in court again on July 1.

His attorneys, Lloyd Suhr and Jackson Lofgren, have asked Southwest District Judge William Herauf to suppress statements made by Sander during two interrogations with Dickinson police. Prosecutors have not yet responded to the motion.

Sander is accused of starting a fire that destroyed Trinity High School on March 3 and endangering the life of religion teacher Robert Storey, who lived in an apartment at the school. Sander is free on \$50,000 bond but is under the custody of his father and his travel is restricted.

In an 18-page brief, the attorneys outlined their case that the interviews with detectives violated Sander's rights.

"They utilized everything from deception and threats to deprivation of human comforts (such as the simple use of a bathroom) in order to obtain the statements they wanted and then attempted to salvage their misconduct by shuffling in a strategically placed and wholly ineffective Miranda warning provided long after the point it should have been to provide the intended protections," Suhr and Lofgren wrote.

The school was heavily damaged in the fire that authorities believe was intentionally set. Students finished out the school year in classes at temporary locations across the city but returned to the school's auditorium for commencement ceremonies last month.

Classes at the school are expected to resume in the fall.

Neb. Insurer Says Hospital Chain Overcharging

BY JOSH FUNK
Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — One of Nebraska's biggest health insurance firms is trying to force Catholic Health Initiatives to negotiate lower prices in the Omaha area, but the hospital network maintains its rates are reasonable.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska said Tuesday it notified Catholic Health Initiatives that it plans to terminate its contract with the provider at the end of August if an agreement cannot be reached. The two sides plan to negotiate throughout the summer.

The insurer says Alegent Creighton routinely charges 10 to 30 percent more than

other Omaha hospitals.

"Today, they are significantly higher than other providers, and they continue to ask for annual increases," said Lee Handke, a senior vice president for Blue Cross.

The contract covers all Alegent Creighton hospitals in Omaha, Schuyler, Plainview and Council Bluffs, Iowa. It also includes hospitals in Lincoln, Grand Island, Kearney and Nebraska City that are affiliated with Catholic Health Initiatives.

All those facilities could be affected by the contract cancellation even though Blue Cross's cost concerns are mostly in the Omaha area.

Handke said part of the

problem is that the insurer's current contract was written before Catholic Health Initiatives became the sole owner of Alegent Creighton, and the contract was extended to all of CHI's facilities throughout the state.

But Alegent Creighton CEO Dr. Cliff Robertson said he thinks the dispute centers on the payment model in the contract more than on the prices his facility is charging "We believe our prices are not only fair, but they are absolutely in line with the market," Robertson said.

Alegent Creighton wants to move away from a traditional contract that promises payment for certain services to one that focuses more on the overall well-being of pa-

tients and the total cost of treatment.

Robertson said he thinks the new contract model he's suggesting might actually reduce the total cost of treatment, but the two companies will have to hash out the details during negotiations.

The 700,000 people insured by Blue Cross will be able to continue seeing doctors affiliated with the Catholic Health Initiatives network at least through Aug. 31.

The insurer sent a letter to its customers and issued a news release about the dispute this week. Blue Cross also put together a website with more details about the contract dispute, <http://update.nebraskablue.com>.

Area

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Stevens of Yankton, is running for re-election.

The other District 18 House candidates are Democrats Jay Williams and Terry Winter, both of Yankton.

One other area legislative primary was on the ballot Tuesday.

Republican voters in District 16 were deciding a primary race advancing two House candidates to the November general election. District 16 covers Lincoln and Union counties.

Jim Bolin and David Anderson advanced with a respective 1,329 and 1,049 votes. Kevin Jensen finished with 778 votes.

Bolin and Jensen are both from Canton, while Anderson is from Hudson.

Bolin and Anderson currently hold the two seats. Bolin is running as an incumbent, while Anderson was appointed by Gov. Dennis Daugaard to fill a vacancy.

The two GOP primary winners will advance to the general election, where they will face Democrats Jim Feddersen of Beresford and Brian Shanks of Elk Point.

In the District 16 Senate race, Republican incumbent Dan Lederman of Dakota Dunes will face Democrat Ann Tornberg of Beresford. Neither faced primary opposition.

Not all of Tuesday's ballot measures involved candidates.

In a separate measure, Union County voters decided the fate of the 911 emergency center in Elk Point.

In the end, voters backed the opt-out resolution 1,490-553 for 73 percent approval.

The opt-out will provide \$250,000 annually for three years to fund the dispatch center. The measure will raise taxes \$16.50 per \$100,000 of property value.

If the measure failed, Union County would have taken bids from other counties and contracted out the 911 service to a neighboring call center.

Around the rest of southeast South Dakota, voters decided GOP primary races for county seats in Bon Homme, Hutchinson and Union counties. Democratic primaries were held in Charles Mix and Clay counties.

In Bon Homme County, Republicans chose the incumbent in both primary races. In both cases, there are no Democratic or independent candidates, meaning the GOP primary winners will take office.

In the auditor's race, incumbent Tamara Brunken defeated challenger Jenn Knoll 551-363. Both candidates are from Springfield.

In the sheriff's race, in-

cumbent Lenny Gramkow of Avon defeated challenger Michael Hofeldt of Viborg 764-151.

Hofeldt, a former Springfield police chief, currently serves as a Viborg police officer in Turner County.

In Charles Mix County, the Democratic primary for sheriff literally came down to the wire as Desarae Gravatt of Lake Andes defeated Gene Niehus of Wagner 324-322. The election could face a possible recount.

Gravatt held an early lead, but the margin dwindled over the course of the evening and ended with the final two-vote win.

Gravatt has worked as a Wagner police officer since July 2011. She also works part-time for the Douglas County sheriff's department.

Niehus serves as chief deputy for the Douglas County sheriff's office. He has spent the last 22 years as a member of the Wagner police force, with eight of those years as Wagner police chief. He also serves on the Wagner school board.

The Democratic primary winner faces Republican incumbent Randy Thaler of Lake Andes in the November general election.

Thaler ran as a Democrat in the 2010 election but recently switched to the Republican Party. In a news release, he said the switch reflected his disagreement with recent Democratic Party stances, particularly on gun control.

ANDES CENTRAL SCHOOL BOARD: Incumbent Kristin M. Dvorak and challenger Will Bennett won the two, 3-year terms with a respective 151 and 115 votes. The other incumbent, Ardie Lantz, finished with 91 votes.

A total of 206 ballots were cast. The three-year terms for Dvorak and Bennett will begin July 1.

LAKE ANDES CITY COUNCIL: In the mayor's race, Cindy Mengenhauser defeated Carrol "Red" Allen 89-63 for the final year of the unexpired term of Dan Park, who resigned when he began a job in Sioux Falls.

A total of 152 ballots were cast.

Mengenhauser has previously served as mayor and councilwoman. Allen has served as a state legislator and Charles Mix County commissioner.

In the Ward 1 alderman race, challenger Amanda Frandsen defeated incumbent Dennis Tronvold 30-22 for the two-year term.

A total of 52 ballots were cast.

In Clay County, Democrats advanced two candidates for at-large County Commissioner.

Michael P. Manning and Phyllis W. Packard move on to the general election, as they collected 554 and 435 votes, respectively. Ray Hof-

man, who current serves as

the Clay County register of deeds, finished with 408.

All three candidates are from Vermillion.

No Republicans or independents filed for the at-large commission seats.

In the contest for Republican precinct committee-

woman, Laura Archambeau defeated Eliann Carr 20-11.

In Vermillion, city voters will decide the mayor's race and three council seats. At least three new aldermen are guaranteed as incumbents aren't seeking another term.

In the mayor's race, incumbent Jack Powell defeated challenger Stan Peterson 927-246.

In the Southeast Ward, challenger Rich Holland won the seat with 237 votes, followed by incumbent Dennis Zimmerman with 212 and challenger Kris O'Connor with 150.

In the Northeast Ward, Holly Meins defeated Sara Bye 58-56 in a battle of newcomers that could result in a recount. Incumbent Kent Osborne didn't seek re-election.

In the Central Ward, Katherine Price defeated Jennifer French 129-89 in a battle of newcomers. Incumbent John Grayson didn't seek re-election.

In the Northwest Ward, Parker Erickson ran unopposed for alderman. Incumbent Tom Davies decided not to seek another term.

In Hutchinson County, Republicans decided two pri-



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