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Wage

From Page 1

James Goddard, a staff attorney with Nebraska Appleseed. "Raising the minimum wage would allow more families to make ends meet."

Nordquist and Conrad began pushing for a ballot initiative after a similar measure died in the Legislature this year. Supporters fell five votes short of the 25 they needed to advance the bill through a first-round vote.

Canvassers will travel statewide over the next few weeks to gather signatures from smaller population counties, as required by state law. Campaign leaders have also mailed hundreds of petition packets to circulators who completed an online course on how to properly gather signatures, Nordquist said.

Several polls have indicated a majority of Nebraskans support raising the minimum wage, but the proposal is opposed by business groups that contend it would cut into the profits of small companies that are most vulnerable to financial pressures.

A higher wage could also make it more difficult for businesses to hire young, inexperienced workers who want on-the-job training, said Bob Hallstrom, a lobbyist for the Nebraska Federation of Independent Business.

"Anytime you look at an increase in the minimum wage, particularly on the heels of a recession, it's a concern for small businesses that are struggling," Hallstrom said. "The minimum wage, pure and simple, adds cost to their bottom line."

To qualify for the ballot, Nebraska requires petition circulators to gather signatures from 7 percent of registered voters. That total must include at least 5 percent of registered voters from each of 38 counties — two-fifths of Nebraska's 93 counties.

The requirement is designed to ensure petition gatherers can't focus solely on higher population, urban areas.

Nebraska Public Power To Issue \$250M In Bonds

COLUMBUS, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska Public Power District plans to issue \$250 million in bonds this week to pay for transmission line projects.

Some of the proceeds from the bonds that will be issued Monday will be used to repay some of its existing bonds.

The fixed-rate, taxable bonds will be sold to retail and institutional investors.

The bonds will be repaid over a 30-year period. Individuals interested in purchasing bonds should contact their broker.

South Dakota

Homeland Sec. Spending Chided

By The Associated Press

RAPID CITY — South Dakota's spending of the more than \$100 million it has received since 2003 in homeland security grants has been criticized in a federal report.

The state ranks sixth in the nation on per capita homeland security spending. But the money meant to keep the state safe from a terrorist attack has been spent in a variety of ways, including the purchase of fire trucks and ambulances for small communities, communications gear for local and county police, and surveillance cameras for schools and police stations, the *Rapid City Journal* reported Sunday.

A federal report issued in May questioned whether that has been money well spent. "We were unable to determine the extent to which the (federal homeland security) grants enhanced the state's ability to prepare for and re-

spond to disasters and acts of terrorism," according to the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General Report. "The state does not have a system to measure preparedness."

Meanwhile, state officials have acknowledged that South Dakota has very little threat of terrorism.

The newspaper reported that the most recent South Dakota Homeland Security strategic plan implicitly mentions that lack of threats. When listing the menaces to the state, the report mentioned white supremacist organizations, and the chance that environmentalists might attack the proposed Dewey-Burdock uranium mine or Keystone XL pipeline.

The only terrorist threat cited in the report is the possibility that someone in the state might become a radical and build a bomb from instructions found online.

Law enforcement officials, whose departments

have benefited from some of the grants, are defending how the South Dakota Office of Homeland Security has allocated some of the funds.

Pennington County Sheriff Kevin Thom said he agrees with the use of the money to pay for regional communications systems. It's all about "interoperability," Thom said.

"Say something catastrophic happens in Rapid City or happens in Spearfish or wherever. Units that respond will have the ability to go to a common channel and talk to each other," Thom said.

Steve Pluta, a former FBI investigator who became director of the state Office of Homeland Security in 2013, said disaster-preparation exercises that the office helps coordinate are evidence the money is being well-spent.

He also told the newspaper that even before the May report, he had begun working on a better strategic plan for the state.

SD Indian Ed. Draws Leader From Retirement

BY NORA HERTEL
Associated Press

PIERRE — Former educator Lowell Amiotte is leaving retirement and treasured time with his own 13 grandchildren to help Native American children statewide.

The 72-year-old Oglala Sioux member takes over June 9 as director of the Office of Indian Education, eight years after retiring from South Dakota State University where he served as assistant professor in the College of Education since 1990.

Amiotte said he was first offered the position when it was created in 2007. The last director left in 2012 and Keith Moore, the original director, has led the office in the interim.

"I guess they appealed to my ego," Amiotte joked about why he agreed to take the job until someone capable, willing and younger comes along. "They said, 'You can do it.'"

The office is charged with addressing the achievement gap between native and non-native students and seeing to the educational needs of the state's largest minority. Native Americans make up nearly 9 percent of South Dakota's population and there are nine tribes in the state.

While the state has oversight over public schools, the Indian office also coordinates with tribal schools and the federal Bureau of Indian Education.

"We do what we can do to be collaborative," said Melody Schopp, South Dakota's secretary of education.

Amiotte's longtime friend and colleague Jr. Bettelyoun understands why Amiotte agreed to come back.

"Sometimes it's hard to retire when you keep your interest level up and you want better things for Indian children," he said. "Lowell is well known, well respected, and will be looked upon as a good candidate for the position."

Amiotte has a degree in counseling, experience working on budgets and experience with federal boards and offices, all of which Amiotte thinks will help him help educators.

Amiotte began his career as a teacher in Wyoming and Nebraska in the 1960s. In 1972, he became director for the Center of American Indian Studies at Black Hills State University. He also spent three years as the president of the Oglala Lakota College and worked in the Indian education program for Rapid City Area Schools. And he's a former president of the National Indian Education Association board.

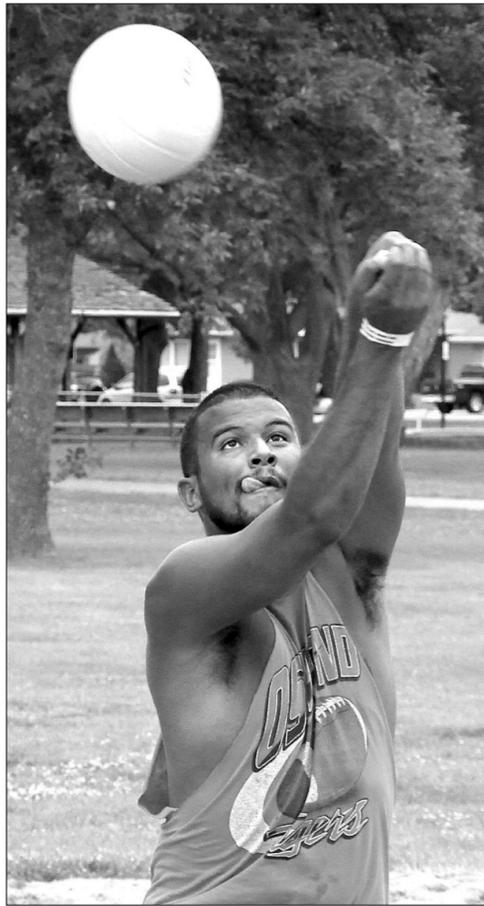
Chairman of the State-Tribal Relations Committee Sen. Jim Bradford said it was tough to have the spot open for a few years. The Pine Ridge Democrat said he's glad to see it filled by Amiotte, who already has credibility with Native Americans in the state.

Amiotte said he will have to re-familiarize himself with the issues affecting Native American students. He said he doesn't know much about Teach for America, for example, a federal program that sends young volunteers to teach on reservations and draws mixed support from state legislators. He said he's heard good things about the program.

Amiotte and Bettelyoun agree that not much has changed in Indian Education in the past few decades. Funding for education and economic hardship on reservations remain issues that hurt native students.

Amiotte said it's not enough to talk about curriculum, but administrators must consider a bigger picture, such as making sure students are well fed.

Ribfest Return



KELLY HERTZ/P&D
Bryce Johnson of Osmond, Neb., hits the ball over the net during Saturday's sand volleyball tournament held at Memorial Park in Yankton in conjunction with Rockin' Ribfest. Johnson played on the VermKatz team. To see more photos from Ribfest, visit spot.ted.yankton.net.

Neb. Farmers Must Decide Whether To Replant

UEHLING, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska farmers who sustained heavy damage in last week's severe weather will face some tough decisions in the days ahead.

Farming and crop insurance experts tell the *Fremont Tribune* farmers will have to consider a number of factors when deciding whether to replant.

Dodge County Extension Educator Nathan Mueller said deciding to replant will depend on what insurance coverage farmers have, what herbicides they used this spring and how bad the damage is.

"Most of the fields between north of Scribner and Uehling, you can hardly tell that anything was planted," he said. "It cut the corn and soybean plants straight to the ground, and then covered up what was left with mud."

Significant crop damage is common in Burt, Cuming,

Dodge and Washington counties after Tuesday's large hail and strong winds.

Farmers can attend a meeting at 1 p.m. Tuesday at Uehling Auditorium to get advice from experts. The speakers will include crop insurance agents, and plant and soil experts.

Mueller said even if farmers decide not to replant a cash crop, like corn or soybeans, it may make sense to plant a cover crop to limit erosion and improve soil health.

Most farmers in the area carry crop insurance, but they probably don't all have specific coverage for hail damage, so that might affect their decisions about whether to replant.

More information to help farmers deal with hail damage to their crops is available online at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's extension website, <http://www.extension.unl.edu>.

Judge: Jenkins Must Undergo Evaluation

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A judge has ruled that a man convicted of killing four people in Omaha last summer should undergo a psychiatric evaluation in prison, rather than being taken to a state psychiatric hospital.

The *Omaha World-Herald* reports that Douglas County District Judge Peter Bataillon issued the ruling Friday after prosecutors argued that moving Nikko Jenkins from the Lincoln prison where he's being held to a psychiatric hospital would pose a security risk.

A defense psychiatrist says Jenkins' mental state had deteriorated since he was convicted in April of four counts of first-degree murder.

Jenkins is awaiting sentencing for the August 2013 deaths of Curtis Bradford, Jorge Cajiga-Ruiz, Juan Uribe-Pena and Andrea Kruger.

Cemetery Thefts Are Becoming Blatant

NORTH PLATTE, Neb. (AP) — The owners of a North Platte cemetery say they are fed up with the increasingly blatant thefts of items from graves.

Sue Condon, co-owner of Floral Lawns Memorial Gardens cemetery, tells the *North Platte Telegraph* that items stolen since Memorial Day include solar lights, pinwheels and planters.

Condon says the thefts have become more frequent over the past three years, but that this year has been the worst.

She says that on Thursday afternoon, she and her husband had cleared decorations from the infant section of the cemetery to mow, putting the decorations in a silver trailer. But when she and her husband returned to the trailer that evening, it has been cleaned out.

Delta Airlines Debuts Atlanta-RC Flight

RAPID CITY (AP) — Delta Airlines has begun offering a weekly nonstop flight between Rapid City and Atlanta.

The *Rapid City Journal* reports the new flight comes after the Rapid City Regional Airport spent \$19 million renovating the facility.

Atlanta is the world's busiest airport offering direct service to 207 destinations including 61 international locations in 43 countries.

Ray Carpenter is the board president of Rapid City's airport. Carpenter says Delta's new flight will allow passengers in the area to have access to the southeastern United States and will provide 80 additional destinations across the domestic and international flight community.

The airport in western South Dakota offers nonstop service to eight more cities: Salt Lake City, Minneapolis, Denver, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Las Vegas and Phoenix.

Daugaard Headed To Govs' Meeting

PIERRE (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Dennis Daugaard is headed to Colorado to attend a regional meeting of governors.

The Western Governors' Association 2014 annual meeting runs Sunday through Wednesday in Colorado Springs.

Department of Interior Secretary Sally Jewell will give a keynote speech Monday on drought, wildfires and other issues.

The association was established in 1984. It aims to help state leaders share ideas, concerns and approaches to dealing with issues unique to the West.

Postal Service Closes Mellette office

MILLETTE (AP) — The U.S. Postal Service has suspended operations at the Mellette post office, saying the building has deteriorated to the point where it isn't safe for customers or employees.

The *American News in Aberdeen* reports the Postal Service says the office has been "emergency suspended."

Mellette mayor Brian Bauer says residents are disappointed they can't get their mail in town. Residents also say they haven't been sufficiently informed about the post office's activities.

Bauer says the condition of the Mellette post office has been poor for the past 15 or 20 years. He says members of the community have approached the Postal Service about improving the situation before.

Bauer says the Postal Service is staying tight-lipped about the future of the location.

Field Of 4 Set For SD Senate Battle

BY DIRK LAMMERS
Associated Press

SIoux FALLS — South Dakota's voter base leans heavily Republican, but Democrat Rick Weiland says he thinks he's got a legitimate shot at capturing the U.S. Senate seat up for grabs in November.

When former Gov. Mike Rounds emerged from a crowded Republican primary field last week, it confirmed what had been long expected: Weiland will be facing an opponent with more cash, greater name recognition and stronger national party support. But the Sioux Falls restaurant owner has spent months driving to hundreds of small towns across the state in a style reminiscent of former boss U.S. Sen. Tom Daschle, and he thinks those cafe chats about the need to take back government from big corporations will pay off later.

"I just have to believe that kind of hard work, shoe leather, is going to mean a lot when people go to the polls in November," said Weiland, 55.

Weiland, Rounds and two independents — former Republican U.S. Sen. Larry Pressler and former state lawmaker Gordon Howie — are vying for the seat being vacated by retiring Democratic Sen. Tim Johnson.

The presence of those two independents

has the potential to fracture the Republican vote, but Rounds thinks conservatives will unite behind him. He said Republicans, conservative independents and even conservative Democrats want to see change in Washington and bring a Republican majority to the Senate.

"They're going to want to be part of a winning team" said Rounds, 59. "They're going to want to see results. They care deeply about bringing back the United States Senate and taking it away from the majority leader right now."

The South Dakota U.S. Senate race is one of three involving a seat now held by a Democrat — also including West Virginia and Montana — where Republicans believe they have the best chance to win because President Barack Obama lost those states in the 2012 election. Republicans need to make a net gain of six seats to take over the majority in the U.S. Senate.

Of South Dakota's more than 510,000 registered voters at the end of May, 237,000 listed themselves as Republicans, 175,000 classified themselves as Democrats and 83,000 had no party affiliation, according to records from the South Dakota Secretary of State's office. But despite those numbers, South Dakotans have shown they have no problem sending Democrats to the U.S. Senate, as evidenced by Johnson, Daschle, Jim Abourezk and George McGovern.

Pressler, who describes himself as a "passionate centrist," said whether the Senate remains under Democratic control or shifts to Republicans, the chamber will be closely divided.

He said an independent voice with his experience — two terms in the House followed by three Senate terms from 1975 to 1997 — could be an asset for the state.

"An independent could be potentially powerful, and I'll be able to take my seniority back to the Senate," said Pressler, 72. "My biggest job will be to persuade people that an independent can be elected and that he can be an effective voice for South Dakota."

Howie, 64, entered the race as an independent in April but immediately put his campaign on hold to support former state Rep. Stace Nelson in the Republican primary and would drop out if Nelson won. Nelson captured nearly 18 percent of the vote to Rounds' 55 percent.

Howie said he's offering a choice for the 45 percent of Republicans who did not vote for Rounds to back a campaign based on conservative principles including faith and freedom, reigning in spending and cutting taxes.

"We're going to try to provide an alternative to the three moderates who are in the race," Howie said.