

MIDWEST DIGEST

Spring Flooding Begins In South Dakota

PIERRE (AP) — It might still be winter, but spring flooding has begun in South Dakota.

The National Weather Service has posted warnings for moderate flooding on the James River at Forestburg and Mitchell and for major flooding at Huron and Scotland in the coming days, because of snowmelt and rain.

Ice jams and rain raised the level of the Bad River near Fort Pierre on Tuesday. Stanley County Emergency Management Director Rob Fines says the river stabilized once the ice jams broke, but not before damage was done to some gravel roads. Some sections had to be closed.

Ice jams also have caused river bottom flooding along the White River in southwest South Dakota. Near-record levels have threatened two rural families south of Reliance. One family, Joel and Vicki Stuart, have been moving livestock off their farm, as well as furniture.

17 Arrests At Meatpacking Plant In Neb.

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Seventeen people were in federal custody Wednesday as part of an ongoing investigation of a Fremont meatpacking plant by immigration officials, authorities said.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement spokesman Greg Palmore said the 17 were arrested Tuesday at Fremont Beef Company for immigration violations.

Immigration agents performed an "enforcement action" — not a raid — to determine whether Fremont Beef is complying with immigration laws, he said. No further information is available, he said.

Fremont Beef president Les Leech said in a statement issued Wednesday that his company was among a thousand nationwide that were randomly selected for immigration audits. The names of Fremont Beef workers were entered in the Federal Trade Commission's identity theft database, which showed 18 matches, he said. Those workers were taken in for questioning.

Illegal immigration has been a hot topic in Fremont, which is among a handful of Nebraska cities that have seen marked demographic changes primarily because of Hispanic work forces at meatpacking plants.

A group of Fremont residents are pushing for a special election on a proposal to ban renting to and hiring illegal immigrants within city limits. But city officials are seeking to block the election because they say the ordinance would conflict with federal law and lead to costly litigation. The Nebraska Supreme Court has agreed to take up the case.

S.D. Lawmakers Delay Budget Decisions

PIERRE (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers are waiting to put the finishing touches on the state budget until they know the fate of some other bills that will determine state spending and tax collections.

The Joint Appropriations Committee met briefly early Wednesday, then recessed indefinitely. Senate Appropriations Chair Jean Hunhoff of Yankton says the committee cannot consider amendments to the spending bill until the Legislature completes work on some other measures.

One key bill still pending would increase state revenue by cutting the size of tax refunds given to large construction projects.

Members of the Republican majority have pledged to cut Gov. Mike Rounds' proposed budget by about \$40 million to avoid using reserve funds.

Proposal Would Expand S.D. Fireworks Use

PIERRE (AP) — South Dakotans would get another opportunity each year to buy and discharge fireworks under a bill headed to the governor's desk.

The Legislature on Wednesday approved retail fireworks sales from Dec. 23 through Jan. 2. Counties could prohibit their use if the fire danger was high.

Fireworks sales and use are currently allowed from June 27 through July 5.

S.D. Lawmakers OK Sex Registry Change

PIERRE (AP) — A measure allowing some people to get their names removed from the state sex offender registry has been approved by the South Dakota Legislature.

The Senate on Wednesday approved some minor changes made by the House. It will become law if signed by Gov. Mike Rounds.

The measure creates three levels of sex crimes. Those convicted of the most serious sex offenses, including crimes against children, could never get off the offender list. Those convicted of midlevel sex crimes could ask to be removed after 25 years.

And those convicted of less serious crimes, such as statutory rape when the offender is no older than 21, could seek to be removed from the list after 10 years.

Neb. Lawmakers Blocking Teacher Pay Plan

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A plan to boost the pay of high-performing teachers in Nebraska has hit a wall of opposition despite support from major educational groups in the state.

Nebraska lawmakers stopped short of voting on the bill (LB1014) Wednesday. Its sponsor said opponents were trying to kill it with a filibuster.

Among opponents' concerns is that school districts would not fairly distribute the money and that it was not known how much money would be available.

The bill would create a teacher-pay fund with money from wind and solar energy leases on land owned by the state Board of Educational Lands and Funds.

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House, Senate Fail To Agree On S.D. School Aid

BY CHET BROKAW
Associated Press Writer

PIERRE — A plan to boost state aid to South Dakota school districts after the economy rebounds appeared dead Wednesday after House and Senate members failed to agree on a plan.

The House had passed a bill that would provide no increase in state financial aid to schools next year. The Senate's version gave schools no increase next year because of the budget crisis, but would substantially increase state aid in future years when the economy improves.

A committee of senators and representatives met Wednesday to negotiate a compromise, but the lawmakers were unable to agree.

That means current law, which would give schools a 1.2 percent funding boost next year, would stay in effect. But schools almost certainly will get no increase next year because it would be unlikely that lawmakers would put the extra aid money in the state budget, said Senate Republican Leader Dave Knudson of Sioux Falls.

The issue was among a handful of key financial proposals that must be settled before lawmakers can complete next year's state budget. The Legislature plans to pass a budget before Friday, the last day of the main run of this year's legislative session.

State law now requires that state aid to schools increases each year by the rate of inflation, up to a maximum of 3 percent.

The Senate bill, sponsored by Knudson, would have required that state funding increase each year by the same percentage as overall general state revenues. The increase could not have exceeded 4 percent or the rate of inflation, whichever was greater. The plan also would have prevented aid from shrinking from year to year or rising by more than 7 percent.

Knudson said even though schools wouldn't get a funding increase next year, his bill would let them share in the good times when the economy rebounds and state tax revenue increases.

"I think education is in fact the most important expenditure we make," Knudson said.

House Republican Leader Bob Faehn said Knudson's proposal would lead to large annual variations in state aid to education, which would make it hard for school districts to plan their budgets.

"I think stability is important," said Faehn, of Watertown. The negotiating committee of three senators and three representatives could not get enough votes to pass either Knudson's proposal or the House plan to simply hold next year's aid at this year's level.



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