

# Property Taxes, State Parks Eyed In Neb. Budget

BY GRANT SCHULTE  
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Property owners could get a tax break, state parks could get new cabins, and Nebraska could see new flood- and drought-mitigation projects if a series of budget bills become law. The Legislature's Appropriations Committee is expected to finish its work this week on changes to the state budget. The tentative package includes \$25 million for a state fund that offsets property taxes, \$17.5 million for deferred park maintenance and \$32 million for water projects by the middle of next year. Sen. Heath Mello, the committee chairman, said lawmakers avoided tapping the state's cash reserve for long-term expenses. The rainy-day fund is traditionally used for construction projects and to pay the state's bills when revenue drops unexpectedly. Mello says he wants to end the current budget year with at least \$643 million in the fund. "In developing a state budget, it's about balancing priorities," Mello said.

Lawmakers were given more leeway with the budget on Friday, when the Nebraska Economic Forecasting Board predicted that the state will collect an additional \$99 million in the current two-year budget period. State revenue was expected to reach \$4.1 billion in the fiscal year that ends on June 30, and \$4.2 billion the following year. The committee has agreed to support an additional \$25 million per year for the state's property tax credit program, which is used to offset local property taxes. State tax officials calculate the credit by dividing the total amount available by the total value of taxable property in Nebraska. The fund has held steady at \$115 million over the last several years, even as property values — and property taxes — have increased. The initial water projects include Omaha sewer upgrades, shoring up levees around Offutt Air Force Base and funding to take some irrigated cropland out of production in central Nebraska. Taking the land out of production will help recharge the groundwater supply

and ease pressure on the Platte River in dry years, said Sen. Tom Carlson of Holdrege, who led a state water-funding task force last year. Carlson said the proposed budget bills would generate about \$32 million for water projects by mid-2015. The Nebraska Department of Natural Resources will designate future water projects, he said. "This is a really good start," Carlson said. "We've never had this kind of a commitment before from the state, and I'm really pleased with it." Nebraska's state parks could also receive new funding for upgrades to ensure they comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and to build new bedroom-camper cabins at Ponca State Park. The cost of deferred maintenance in the state parks has risen to \$43 million, according to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. "I am convinced that we can no longer ignore the problem, which is very serious now," Lincoln Sen. Bill Avery said in a committee hearing last month.

## South Dakota

# Gun Groups Pressing Legislators

BY NORA HERTEL  
Associated Press

PIERRE — Several pieces of gun-related legislation are making their way through the South Dakota Capitol this session, and two national lobbying groups have jumped into the fray. The National Rifle Association and the South Dakota Gun Owners, an affiliate of the National Association for Gun Rights, have weighed in on the bills, sometimes taking opposing positions. And interviews with state lawmakers show the groups' efforts are causing a stir among representatives in the House. "You have these gun organizations coming in, and they're in competition with one another," said Rep. Steve Hickey, R-Sioux Falls. Hickey said he owns 17 guns and is an NRA member. But he and the NRA did not agree on a change he brought to a bill allowing folks with permits to carry concealed weapons in the Capitol. Hickey's alteration would have allowed guns in the Capitol except when the



Nelson

Supreme Court and Legislature meet and during the governor's budget address. "The people of District 9 elected me, not the NRA," Hickey said. "And just because a bill says 'gun' at the top of it doesn't mean it's a good gun bill." The NRA, previously neutral to the bill, opposed Hickey's amendment. "We don't like to make special carve-outs on the concealed carry law," said John Commerford, a lobbyist with the NRA. During debate on that bill in February, Rep. Anne Hajek, R-Sioux Falls, urged legislators to focus on other issues such as funding and Medicaid, which she said matter more to residents. "This is not a constituent bill," Hajek said. "They haven't told us or asked us to spend hours and hours on the floor talking about putting guns in

somebody's hands in the gallery so we'll feel safer." The bill ultimately failed after a tense floor debate. Another factor in the debates about the legislation is the NRA's score card system, which the group says it uses to advise voters. Around election time, the NRA makes charts drawing upon legislators' statements, voting records and responses to an NRA questionnaire. Commerford said the score cards, or political preference charts help "inform our membership as to who the best candidates are to protect their second amendment rights." During the vote on the Capitol guns bill, "the rumor was spread throughout our whole caucus: 'The NRA's here. This is going to be a score card bill,'" Hickey said. NRA member Jeff Gregg is the owner of Jeff's Gun Vault in Winner, S.D. He said he considers more than those charts when he votes. "I would look at it," Gregg said, "but still try to research the actual person, not solely

the views of a group." Hickey and Rep. Stace Nelson said they think the NRA's scoring system is subjective. Nelson, a Fulton Republican said: "I'm a Second Amendment supporter, and I don't take my cues from any of the gun organizations. I do the right thing." On one piece of legislation, the two gun groups have taken different stances, a split that could put legislators in a tough position if the organizations rally their memberships. The NRA has endorsed a bill that would keep guns from those who are mentally ill and deemed a threat to themselves or others. Commerford said they are hoping to get this legislation passed in all 50 states. The South Dakota Gun Owners and its national affiliate oppose the bill. "This mental health legislation targets law-abiding gun owners to strip them of their right to self-defense without a crime ever being committed," said Danielle Thompson, press secretary for the National Association for Gun Rights, in an email.

## Neb. Man Gets 50 Years In Shooting

MADISON, Neb. (AP) — A northeast Nebraska man has been sentenced to 50 years in prison for a 2012 shooting that left another man paralyzed. The *Norfolk Daily News* reports 29-year-old Jordan Beehn was sentenced Friday for first-degree assault and tampering with a witness. Prosecutors say Beehn shot Jorge Alberto Zepeda-Flores in the face after he tried to break up a fight between Beehn's wife and another woman outside a Norfolk bar. Beehn later encouraged his wife in a letter from jail to convince witnesses to change their stories. Zepeda-Flores is now confined to a wheelchair, and his family members must care for him.

## SF Airport Trends Higher For Boardings

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — Officials at the Sioux Falls Regional Airport say boardings are up 11 percent this year — and trending higher. The *Sioux Falls Argus Leader* reports that growth projections show the number of passengers traveling from the airport increasing by almost 60 percent during the next 20 years. The airport authority reviewed the figures last week as part of the facility's master plan. The projections were unanimously approved by the group and will be sent to the Federal Aviation Administration for review. Figures show that 470,000 passengers traveled to and from the airport last year. It averages about 1,200 passengers per day.

## Homeowners Complain Of Frozen Pipes

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — Sioux Falls officials say evidence of this year's harsh winter weather can be found underground. Homeowners are complaining about frozen pipes, and it could get worse. City water distribution supervisor Brad Maddox said officials in his office have fielded more calls from homeowners about frozen pipes than he can remember in his 34 years with the city. "This winter is not typical," Maddox told the *Sioux Falls Argus Leader*. Bill Wagner said his welding company in Brandon, on the outskirts of Sioux Falls, typically gets a few calls for service through the winter. He said he's hearing from two or three people a day who are without water because of frozen pipes. Some parts of town are more susceptible to problems, depending on the type of soil. Those pipes that run through rocky soil aren't as well-insulated as those buried in black dirt. Officials suggest that homeowners run cold water tap at times throughout the day and keep faucets flowing for longer periods of time. Maddox said the problem is more common in households that don't use much water, such as houses that sit empty or have just a single occupant. That's when it's important to run extra water to prevent freezing pipes, he said. "We're not asking anybody to waste water. They need to be a little more liberal with their water usage," Maddox said. Officials are warning residents to be on guard when the weather turns warmer. That's because when temperatures climb to the mid-40s and into the 50s, the frost goes deeper. "The frost runs from the sun," said Greg Anderson, the city's water superintendent.

## Spearfish Building Blaze Suspicious

SPEARFISH (AP) — Authorities say a fire at a Spearfish office building was the result of arson. The *Rapid City Journal* reports that a preliminary investigation shows that the Friday morning fire at the Hoggatt CPA office building was deliberately set. Police say the building was severely damaged. No injuries were reported. No further details have been released.

## Extension Connects Hay Sellers, Buyers

BROOKINGS (AP) — SDSU Extension is helping to connect hay and forage suppliers with those who need them through a Facebook group. The "SDSU Extension Feed & Forage Finder" group is open to anyone that is interested in either buying or selling hay or feedstuffs. Cow/Calf Field Specialist Warren Rusche says listings can include baled hay, straw or silage as well as individuals seeking pasture to rent, custom feeding or custom grazing arrangements, explained. He says the purpose for starting the group was to provide a low-cost way for buyers and sellers to connect.

## OBITUARIES

### Willard 'Willie' Tracy

Willard "Willie" Tracy, age 77 of Sibley, IA, formerly of Ocheyedan, IA died Thursday, February 27, 2014 at Sibley Nursing & Rehabilitation Center in Sibley, IA. Funeral service will be 10:30 a.m. Monday, March 3, 2014 at the Trinity Lutheran Church in Sibley, with Reverend Barb Kopperud officiating. Lunch will be at the Trinity Lutheran Church directly after the service, followed by burial at the Ocheyedan Township Cemetery in Ocheyedan, IA. Visitation will be Sunday, March 2, from 4-7 p.m., with the family present from 5-7 p.m. at the Jurrens Funeral Home in Sibley.



Tracy

served as the Justice of the Peace in Osceola County for numerous years. Willie loved to garden, enjoyed woodworking and watching TV. He always looked forward to riding around town with his good friend Andy Mow and having coffee with his brother-in-law, Jerry Ferguson. Willie is survived by his four children: Duane (Lynette) Tracy of Ocheyedan, Gary (Julie) Tracy of Ocheyedan, Donald (Sharon) Tracy of Eagan, MN and Lori (Lavern) Metz of Yankton, SD; eleven grandchildren: Daniel (Samantha) Tracy, Seth Tracy, Greg (Tami) Tracy, Jill (Dusty) Handley, Jodi Tracy, Kyle Tracy, Ethan Tracy, Michael Tracy, Justin (Richie) DePaoles-Metz, Staci (Andrew) Miller and Jason Metz; four great-grandchildren: Lindy Tracy, Kash and Mia Handley and Quintin Tracy; five siblings: John Tracy of Sibley,

IA, Dorthea Morgan of Concord, CA, Eugene Tracy of Round Lake, MN, Clinton Tracy of Worthington, MN and Dick (Janice) Tracy Rothsay, MN; sisters-in-law Shirley Thiesen and Joyce Ferguson; and many nieces, nephews and other extended family. He was preceded in death by his wife, Donna Mae Tracy in 2007; his parents, Eugene and Gertrude Tracy; father and mother-in-law, George "Bud" and Lorraine Grubaugh; and many brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. For a complete obituary and online registry please visit: [www.jurrensfuneralhome.com/](http://www.jurrensfuneralhome.com/) Yankton Press & Dakotan March 3, 2014

### Kaitlyn Erickson

Kaitlyn Ann Erickson, 21, died Friday, Feb. 28, 2014, at Avera Sacred Heart Hospital, Yankton, after a nine-month

battle with cancer. Funeral services are at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 5, at St. John's Lutheran Church, Yankton, with the Rev. Dave Gunderson and the Rev. Steve Weispennig officiating. Burial will be in the Garden of Memories, Yankton. Visitations begin at 5 p.m. Tuesday, March 4, at the Opsahl-Kostel Funeral Chapel, Yankton, with a Scripture service at 7 p.m. Visitations will resume one hour prior the service at the church.

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who passed away on March 7, 2013

**Norine Peterka**  
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*"My own funeral, I'd like to be laid out in a coffin in my own house. I would like my coffin to be put in the double parlor, and I would like all the flowers to be white."*  
Anne Rice

email: [wintzray@iw.net](mailto:wintzray@iw.net)  
website: [www.wintzrayfuneralhome.com](http://www.wintzrayfuneralhome.com)