

South Dakota Legislature

# No Vetos Coming Makes Monday A Short Day

BY BOB MERCER  
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — Several of the Legislature's leaders said Wednesday they've been told there won't be any more vetoes from Gov. Dennis Daugaard.

That means lawmakers will have little to nothing to do Monday, when they return from a two-week break for the final scheduled workday of the 2014 session.

The House of Representatives will open and then coordinate with the Senate for the simultaneous final gavel closing the session known as sine die.

Both chambers are scheduled to begin at 10 a.m. CDT.

"We need a quorum to do this so at least 36 in the House need to be there," House Republican leader David Lust of Rapid City said.

"Should be a short day Monday," House Democratic leader Bernie Hunhoff of Yankton said.

The chief spokesman for Gov. Dennis Daugaard confirmed on Wednesday afternoon there won't be any more vetoes coming.

Tony Venhuizen said the governor shared that information with legislative leaders Monday.

"He wanted to give them time to make the appropriate arrangements for Veto Day," Venhuizen said.

The one veto issued by the governor this year blocked Deadwood from

charging another dollar of occupancy tax on lodging rooms. The statewide limit is \$2. The Senate sustained that veto.

Last year the governor issued two line-item vetoes that changed spending bills and one full veto stopping a fertilizer tax increase. In 2012 he had four full vetoes, one line-item veto and one style-and-form veto. In 2011 there were four full vetoes and one style-and-form veto.

No additional vetoes this year somewhat surprised Senate president pro tem Corey Brown, R-Gettysburg.

"I had kind of figured there would at least be a couple of style and form vetoes," Brown said.

Nebraska Legislature

# Lawmakers Advance Prison Reform Bills

BY CHRISTINE SCALORA  
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Supporters of proposed changes to Nebraska's prison system advanced a bill Wednesday intended to reduce the inmate population by providing more services to those behind bars.

No lawmakers voted against the bill, which faces two more votes by the Legislature.

The proposal attempts to deal with overcrowding in the prison system by increasing funding for vocational training, mental health and substance abuse services.

Nebraska's prisons were at 156 percent of their capacity as of Feb. 28.

Lawmakers also advanced a bill that would study the creation a facility in Hastings designed to serve mentally ill inmates

and provide drug and alcohol treatment. That bill also faces two more votes in front of the Legislature.

Sen. Brad Ashford of Omaha, chair of the Judiciary Committee, said the bill is a start to addressing the problem of prison overcrowding and making sure the public is safer. The state should not build a new prison, he said.

A lot of vocational training, such as welding and automotive training courses, no longer exists in the prison system, Ashford said. Those programs must be replaced, he said.

"Creating a pathway to a job is critical for prison reform," he said.

In addition to increasing services for inmates, the bill would also divert nonviolent offenders from the Department of Corrections.

The bill would expand specialized substance abuse

supervision and reporting program by adding sites in up to three new counties. The program offers a community-based alternative to incarceration.

The legislation would also ban public employers from asking potential employees if they have a criminal record when they are first applying for a job.

Sen. Bill Avery of Lincoln supported the application change, arguing employers would still have plenty of opportunity to ask about a criminal background.

"I see this as an opportunity where we would allow the ex-convict to have a chance," he said.

Sen. Heath Mello of Omaha, chair of the Appropriations committee, said the changes in the main bill would cost \$14.5 million, with the largest chunk of money going to vocational programs and mental health services.

Sen. Steve Lathrop of Omaha said persistent overcrowding could leave the state liable for a lawsuit by inmates, who could argue they are being kept in cruel and unusual circumstances.

If the prisoners are successful, a judge could order the state to start releasing prisoners or build a new prison.

"We don't want either one of those solutions," Lathrop said.

The bill would create a group to study and provide solutions for overcrowding in the prison system. It would include members of the Legislature, judges, representatives of the executive branch and the Council of State Governments, a national organization that has worked with other states on prison reform.

The bills are LB907 and LB999.

## Neb. Road Bonding Bill Moves On

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A bill to allow bond financing for Nebraska road projects overcame a filibuster in the Legislature by lawmakers concerned about taking on the debt.

After voting to end debate, lawmakers voted to advance the bill Wednesday. The bill faces two more votes in front of the Legislature.

Opponents launched a filibuster to block the measure, which would allow Nebraska to issue up to \$200 million in bonds at a maximum, fixed interest rate of 5 percent.

Nebraska has used a pay-as-you-go system for decades, but supporters say the state could take advantage of low interest rates.

Sen. Annette Dubas of Fullerton says she introduced the bill to accelerate work on long-delayed projects. The bill is LB1092.

## Law Funds Tablets For Hearing-Impaired

PIERRE (AP) — A new law in South Dakota will allow the state to fund smartphones, tablets and other devices for deaf, hard of hearing or speech-impaired people.

Monthly phone bills for all South Dakotans include a 15 cent charge that helps accessibility for people with a range of disabilities. The fund was established 25 years ago.

South Dakota Gov. Dennis Daugaard says the devices that were covered under the telecommunications fund before it was revised by the legislature this year were mostly outdated. Under the new law, people can receive newer devices such as iPads.

The Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program is administered by the state's Department of Human Services.

Information on how to apply to obtain a device can be found online at www.relaysd.com.

## Neb. E-Book Buyers To Share Settlement

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Some Nebraska consumers who overpaid for e-books will be compensated as part of a \$166 million settlement.

Nebraska Attorney General Jon Bruning said Tuesday that people who bought certain electronic books between 2010 and mid-2012 may receive payment.

Nebraska consumers are expected to share \$837,289 from the settlement with five e-book publishers.

The 33 attorneys general who sued say several publishers conspired to raise e-book prices for all consumers and eliminate price competition.

More compensation is possible if a judge decides that Apple should pay consumers for its role in setting e-book prices.

More details about the settlement can be found online at www.ebookagsettlements.com.

## SDNA To Host April GOP Senate Debate

PIERRE (AP) — Five Republicans competing for the party's nomination for U.S. Senate will debate next month in Pierre.

The South Dakota Newspaper Association says it will host a 90-minute debate on April 12 at 10:15 a.m. at the Ramkota Conference Center as part of its annual convention. The debate is open to the public.

Watertown Public Opinion publisher Mark Roby will moderate. Questions will come from a panel of three South Dakota newspaper journalists.

Seeking the GOP nomination are former Gov. Mike Rounds, state Sen. Larry Rhoden of Union Center, state Rep. Stace Nelson of Fulton, Yankton attorney and Army Reserves Maj. Jason Ravensborg and Sioux Falls physician Annette Bosworth.

The June 3 primary winner will join Democrat Rick Weiland and independent Larry Pressler on the Nov. 4 ballot.

## Neb. Dog Dials 911 On Smartphone

BELLEVUE, Neb. (AP) — When Sarpy County emergency dispatchers picked up a recent call, all they heard were the sounds of breathing and scratching.

Dispatchers were worried — until they learned the noises were coming from a dog that dialed 911.

Sarpy County 911 Assistant Director Marilyn Gable tells Omaha television station KETV that it's the first time a dog has called the emergency center.

The dog's owner, Melissa Acosta, says she realized Sophie was scratching at Acosta's smartphone with her paw.

Then Acosta heard a voice from the phone asking for an "address of the emergency."

Acosta says the whole thing is "a little embarrassing." Sophie, of course, had no comment.

# 2012 Indian Casino Revenue In N.D. Grew 6 Percent

BY KEVIN BURBACH  
Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. — The growth in revenue at American Indian casinos in North Dakota in 2012 bucked the national trend, according to a national report released Wednesday.

Casino City's Indian Gaming Industry Report showed that Indian-owned casinos in North Dakota brought in \$184 million in 2012, a 5.5 percent increase from 2011. The growth from 2010 to 2011 was 2.2 percent.

Nationally, growth slowed in 2012 to 2 percent, from 3.4 percent the previous year.

Despite the increases, North Dakota still accounted for just 0.7 percent of total gambling revenue from Indian casinos in the U.S., ranking 15th overall. The data showed that the top five states account for about 60 percent of total gambling revenue in the country.

Scott Davis, executive director of the state's Indian Affairs Commission, said well-paid oil workers contribute a good deal to casinos in the state.

"I think it's obviously that our state economy is doing well," Davis said. "And our casinos are benefiting from that too."

Weston Quinn, the chief

financial officer for Dakota Magic Casino and Resort in Hankinson, said 2012 was the best year financially in the casino's nearly two decades of operation.

"I honestly contribute it to the weather at that time," Quinn said.

Quinn said the mild winter allowed more customers to make their way to their casino, adding that frequent interstate closures during snowy winters can hurt the business. He said many casinos are located farther from the state's more-populated cities and that can make travel difficult, especially for their older customers, in poor driving conditions.

The report also says the number of table games at Indian casinos in North Dakota dropped 29 percent from 2011 to 2012, while the number of slot machines increased 7 percent.

Quinn said the numbers reflect how business at his casino has changed.

"For Dakota Magic, we've been seeing a decrease in table games for years," he said. "And of course, an increase of slots."

Quinn said slots are simpler and are constantly evolving, while table games can be rather difficult for some customers and haven't really changed for many years.

# S.D. Primary Petitions Show Election Hot Spots

BY NORA HERTEL  
Associated Press

PIERRE — The primary petitions that have been filed in South Dakota show the hot spots for the upcoming election.

With Tuesday's deadline past, legislative District 29 in west-central South Dakota drew the most petitions as state Sen. Larry Rhoden of Union Center looks to move up to the U.S. Senate.

Three Republicans have filed to take his place, including Rep. Gary Cammack. At least five Republicans will run for the district's two House seats.

District 18 around Yankton will also be active. Term-limited Republican Sen. Jean Hunhoff and her Democratic brother-in-law Rep. Bernie Hunhoff will run for each other's seats with competition in both chambers.

"That's where the suspense will be on the Republican primary side," said Bob Burns, a retired political science professor from South Dakota State University.

Two other Republican primary races will be in Sioux Falls' Districts 12 and 15. Incumbents there are not seeking re-election, two because of term limits.

Rep. Betty Olson, R-Prairie City, sponsor of several program bills this past session, is also term-limited. She's running for the Senate, and at least three Republicans will try for her seat in a primary.

Burns said Democrats have left many seats unchallenged in the House and Senate, a familiar pattern. Republicans control the House 53-17 and the Senate 28-7.

Zach Crago, executive director of the South Dakota Democratic Party, said more Republican seats will have challengers once the final petitions are certified. Petitions had to be postmarked by 5 p.m. on Tuesday, and Secretary of State Jason Gant said they will likely all be in by Thursday.

"We're going to increase our seats in Pierre this election cycle," Crago said. "Along the I-29 corridor there are lots of opportunities to pick up seats."

The South Dakota Republican Party did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Independent candidates can file petitions through April 29. The primary election will take place June 3.

## 2014 RiverWalk Kick-off

Thurs., March 27 • 5- 8 p.m. • Czecker's, 407 Walnut St.

Get a SNEAK PEEK of the new 2014/2015 RiverWalk sculptures!



SNEAK PEEK: Point of View by Yankton artist Scott Luken!

Help celebrate a new year of RiverWalk! The evening includes a sneak peek of the new sculptures, appetizers, drinks and fun. Committee members will be serving for tips and proceeds go to RiverWalk. For more information, call Katie at 660-5989.

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