

## SD Dems Press For Education Priorities

PIERRE (AP) — South Dakota Democrats are urging Republican lawmakers and Gov. Dennis Daugaard to take on education funding and teacher pay as a key focus for the next legislative session.

Assistant House Minority Leader Julie Bartling pressed her colleagues on Friday to recognize the issues as necessities like the road and bridge funding hike lawmakers passed this session.

Bartling says other lawmakers seemed to like her message.

The state budget the Legislature passed on Friday for the upcoming budget year provides for a 2 percent increase in state aid for education, which is a bump above the statutory requirement to keep up with inflation.

GOP lawmakers point to an education task force Daugaard and Republicans unveiled in February to evaluate the issue ahead of next year's session.



Bartling

## SD Board OKs Slight Tuition Increase

PIERRE (AP) — The South Dakota Board of Education has approved a slight tuition increase that will go into effect in the next school year.

Tuition and fees will go up by \$8 per credit, to a \$145 per credit. That includes a \$2 increase in facility fees and \$1 bump in maintenance and repair fees.

The board also announced that the first Build Dakota scholarships will be awarded to incoming students at the state technical institutes. About 300 scholarships should be awarded in the first year. The program is open to in-state and out-of-state residents.

## Neb. AG Has Prostate Cancer Surgery

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska Attorney General Doug Peterson is recovering at his home after surgery for early stages of prostate cancer.

Peterson went into surgery about 3:15 p.m. Friday afternoon for a three-hour procedure at Methodist Hospital in Omaha, spokeswoman Suzanne Gage said.

Gage said Monday that the early-phase cancer was detected during an appointment in December. Gage said she did not know the motive for the initial appointment. Peterson and his family decided shortly after to approach the diagnosis with prostate removal surgery.

Peterson alerted his bureau chiefs last week and announced the surgery in a staff meeting Thursday.

Gage said it's too early to be certain, but doctors felt the surgery was successful.

"They felt like it was contained and they got what they needed," she said. "They were feeling pretty confident post-surgery."

Peterson left the hospital after a 24-hour observation period and will be conducting business from home this week.

"We're going to encourage him to stay away and make sure he follows his doctor's orders," Gage said.

In 2013, then-Attorney General Jon Bruning underwent successful surgery to remove part of his colon and surrounding lymph nodes after he was diagnosed with colon cancer.

## RC Man Hospitalized After Being Shot

RAPID CITY (AP) — Rapid City police are investigating the shooting of a man near a bar.

Officers responded to the Time Out Lounge area about midnight Saturday after a report of a gunshot. Police say a 29-year-old Rapid City man was taken from the scene to a hospital with serious injuries.

Officers questioned several people but did not make immediate make any arrests.

The victim was not immediately identified.

## 6 Flee From Fire That Destroys Home

HOSKINS, Neb. (AP) — Six people in a family have escaped safely from flames that destroyed their rural home in northeast Nebraska's Stanton County.

County Sheriff Mike Unger says firefighters were dispatched around 1:30 a.m. Monday to the three-story house on Nebraska Highway 35 near Hoskins. Crews from Hoskins, Norfolk, Stanton and Winside were called in to help.

The couple and their four children were home when the fire started, but they fled to safety. The home and an outbuilding were destroyed.

The fire cause is being investigated.

## North Platte Fire Causes Evacuation

NORTH PLATTE, Neb. (AP) — Officials say that several homes are in danger as a grass fire in North Platte continues to spread.

The *North Platte Telegraph* reports that the fire began Monday afternoon between a row of houses and the North Platte River. Several fire units have responded to the fire but haven't yet been able to contain it.

Authorities say an area just south of the fire, on the northeast side of North Platte, has been evacuated. The Red Cross has been called to aid families, and traffic is being diverted.

No further information has been released.

### CORRECTION

MITCHELL (AP) — In a story about Dakota Wesleyan University's decision to drop most of its foreign language curriculum (*Press & Dakotan*, March 9), The Associated Press erroneously reported that the late Sen. George McGovern ran for vice president. He did not, but he was the Democratic Party's presidential candidate in 1972.

## South Dakota

# Science Standards Stir Criticism At Meeting

BY BOB MERCER

State Capitol Bureau

SIoux FALLS — Proposed standards for science education in South Dakota's public schools became the latest Monday to receive criticism from some parents whose values are at odds with the direction of the state Department of Education.

The state Board of Education held a public hearing that was split between science professionals who strongly support the new standards and opposing parents who disbelieve climate change and evolution.

State law requires the board to hold four public hearings on changes in school standards. The board will reach its decision on the science proposal after the fourth hearing set for May 18 in Aberdeen.

One of the mothers who testified Monday said she applied to serve on the work group for the science standards but wasn't selected. She said she knew three other parents who also weren't chosen.

"I wish that you allowed that opportunity to occur," Nicole Osmundson of Sioux Falls said.

Osmundson described climate change and evolution as "fringe ideas" but suggested there could be ways to hold classroom discussions about them without the school system advocating for or against them.

Another opponent, Catherine Billion of Sioux Falls, tied the standards movement to UNESCO — the United Nations Educa-

tional, Scientific and Cultural Organization — and its Agenda 21 plan for sustainable development that was adopted at an international conference in 1992.

Billion said many South Dakota families have values that don't match the school standards as proposed. "And that pits school against parents," she said.

The state board could adopt the science standards at the May 18 meeting or direct the department to further revise them for possible final approval at the board's July 27 meeting in Rapid City.

School districts would be required to have the standards in use for the 2017-2018 academic year, according to the board's president, Don Kirkegaard of Sturgis. He is superintendent for the Meade school district.

The opponents, however, saw more than twice as many science teachers, researchers and scientists testify in favor.

"I am fully in support of the adoption of these standards," said Julie Olson, a Mitchell High School science teacher and president of her profession's statewide organization.

Olson, who's taught for 24 years, said the standards as they are proposed feature a steady progression and would work well for at-risk students, limited-English students and advanced students.

Others said school districts' science standards varied widely and sometimes have been "a slippery slope" that didn't encourage the rigor needed in science disciplines.

Sam Shaw, who's overseen the science

standards development for the department, said the work group accepted earlier suggestions that the standards need to be aligned by grade groupings, such as for grades six through eight and for high school.

The work group will convene this summer to address that situation, according to Shaw.

"That's a big concern for many of us," Kirkegaard said.

The state board also took comments Monday on proposed new standards for three more areas.

Fine arts and K-12 educational technology will get their final public hearings at Aberdeen on May 18, while social studies will get hearings at Aberdeen and on July 27 at Rapid City.

The four-city hearing requirement — Aberdeen, Sioux Falls, Pierre and Rapid City — was adopted by the Legislature after the state board voted in 2010 to adopt Common Core standards for math and English language arts.

People claimed in subsequent years they didn't know the state board planned to take the action. The board followed the standard public process set previously by the Legislature for rule making.

Attempts fell short last year and this year to have the Legislature repeal or suspend Common Core. The new Smarter Balanced standardized assessments using those standards are in their second year of use this spring.

# Groups: Neb. Transparency Law Constantly Under Attack

BY GRANT SCHULTE

Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — A Nebraska law that allows the public to know the names and backgrounds of finalists for top jobs in government is sometimes ignored and frequently challenged, advocates for transparency say.

All efforts to end the disclosure law have failed in the Legislature, but government accountability advocates say they often see a new push for secrecy when a high-profile job comes open.

"They're always trying to move to more secret ways of doing business, based on the idea that they make good decisions without the public," said Jack Gould, a spokesman for Common Cause Nebraska. "It's discouraging, it's disheartening and it brings up the question: What are they trying to hide?"

This week is national Sunshine Week, during which news media outlets across the country feature articles and editorials about the importance of open government. The initiative is led by the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

Secrecy in government hiring has come up frequently.

In January, the Omaha Public Power District, which has more than 360,000 customers in southeast Nebraska, was criticized for refusing to disclose four finalists for its top executive job. The utility's board split into small groups to privately interview finalists, arguing the practice let them skip public meetings.

The board announced it would promote utility Vice Pres-

ident Tim Burke to chief executive officer but then decided to reopen the search after intense criticism and a threat of a lawsuit by the *Omaha World-Herald*.

Last year, Sen. Galen Hadley of Kearney introduced legislation that would have made it easier for the University of Nebraska Board of Regents to search in secret for a new president.

The bill would have allowed the board to deny public records requests for information about candidates for president, vice president and chancellor. Current law requires public agencies to release information once four finalists are selected.

Hadley said at the time that the current system limits the pool of applicants.

Earlier this year, lawmakers considered a bill that would have allowed Nebraska school boards to hold closed sessions when narrowing down job applicants. Current law only allows for closed sessions if necessary to prevent "needless injury" to a candidate's reputation.

Sen. Roy Baker of Lincoln said he introduced the bill to clear up a discrepancy in state law. Nebraska only requires written notice once a board has decided on a position's finalists, but Baker said the state's open meetings law still allows other

semifinalists' identities to become public during the preliminary phases of a search.

Baker, a former superintendent and search firm consultant, said school districts lose good candidates without confidentiality.

News media groups opposed the bill, arguing that superintendents are the highest-paid positions in some rural areas and candidates shouldn't be afraid of public scrutiny.

The bill follows a recent University of Nebraska Board of Regents presidential search in which finalists were disclosed, but discussions about them were kept private. Regents cited the "needless injury" exemption before opening a meeting in January to unanimously choose Hank Bounds.

In 2004, former Attorney General Jon Bruning threatened to sue for the release of University of Nebraska presidential finalists after the university declined to name them.

Releasing the names of finalists allows the public to vet candidates who serve the interests of students, parents and taxpayers, said Allen Beermann, executive director of the Nebraska Press Association. Beermann said releasing finalist names also sets a tone that local government errs on the side of transparency.

## BOR Executive Director Set To Retire

PIERRE (AP) — The executive director and CEO of the South Dakota Board of Regents is retiring at the end of the year.

Jack R. Warner is in his sixth year as head of the system. He's leaving at a time when enrollment at the state's public universities is at an all-time high.

Warner is a Massachusetts native who holds degrees from Boston College, Springfield College and the University of Vermont. He came to South Dakota in 2009 after serving as higher education commissioner in Rhode Island for seven years.

Warner will have the second longest tenure as executive director of the system.

Board president Dean Krogman says Warner has done "extraordinary work" for higher education in South Dakota.

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