

OPS Faces Probe Over Teacher Abuse Case

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The Douglas County attorney's office is investigating Omaha Public Schools to determine if it properly reported allegations against a former teacher accused of molesting students.

Shad Knutson, of Omaha, faces three counts of sexual assault of a child.

KETV in Omaha reported Friday prosecutors want to know why the district didn't report the allegations sooner. Deputy County Attorney Brenda Beadle says there are concerns about allegations of "non-reporting."

District spokeswoman Luanne Nelson says the district investigated the allegations, and there was not enough evidence to report it. She says the inference that the district doesn't protect students is "offending."

The alleged incidents happened in 2008 and 2010. Knutson was put on paid leave in October. He was told in April that his contract wouldn't be renewed, and he resigned.

ND Gets Go-Ahead On Natural Gas Plants

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — North Dakota regulators hope construction of new processing plants will help cut down on natural gas waste.

Natural gas is a byproduct of oil production, and the state Department of Mineral Resources reports that about 27 percent of the state's natural gas output is being burned off.

The flaring takes place because the region doesn't have the capacity to process all of its natural gas.

This week the state Public Service Commission approved plans to build two natural gas processing plants about 16 miles northwest of Williston.

Commissioner Kevin Cramer says the Bear Paw Energy plants can handle 200 million cubic feet of gas daily. Bear Paw is already building another plant near Watford City.

Cramer says each day's wasted gas is enough to heat thousands of North Dakota homes.

SD Man Sentenced For Credit Union Burglary

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — A Huron man was sentenced to five months in custody and five months of home detention for burglarizing a federal credit union.

Thirty-year-old Cory Bender pleaded guilty to burglarizing the M-O Federal Credit Union in Huron in October 2010.

Court files show he entered the building with a key he obtained as a maintenance worker. Prosecutors said he took nearly \$20,000 from a safe and broke a window to make it look like a forced entry.

Special Goose Season Could Benefit Food Banks

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — State wildlife officials hope to increase hunter donations to food banks from a special summer season that targets a too-large population of resident Canada geese in eastern South Dakota.

The early hunting is part of a management plan to reduce the number of geese that live in the state year-round and damage crops. Hunters in 15 eastern South Dakota counties killed around 29,000 geese last year.

The Game, Fish and Parks Department wants to lift a federally-set possession limit. That would allow processors to take donated geese, process them and turn them over to food organizations through the Sportsmen Against Hunger program.

The GF&P also wants to expand the special season to 18 counties this year.

Utility Negotiating To Buy More Wind Power

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — The Lincoln Electric System wants to buy a 10 megawatt share of a new 80-megawatt wind farm under construction near Broken Bow in central Nebraska.

LES says its board voted Friday to allow the utility to negotiate an electricity purchase agreement with the wind farm developers.

Edison Mission Group's Midwest Wind Energy unit is building the wind farm and plans to begin producing power in October 2012.

LES already owns two of its own wind turbines near Lincoln and has agreements to buy wind power from wind farms near Bloomfield and Petersburg, Neb.

The utility serves more than 112,000 residential and 15,000 commercial customers in Lancaster County.

SD Regents Approve New Minor Studies

ABERDEEN (AP) — Four minors and a new certificate program in business, education and technology have been approved by the Board of Regents at three state universities.

Officials said the board approved new minors in accounting and international business at Northern State University and in software engineering at South Dakota State University. The University of South Dakota was approved for a minor in the teaching of Lakota language and a 12-hour certificate program in American Indian education.

The regents met this week in Aberdeen.

Neb. Bill Preserves Collective Bargaining

BY GRANT SCHULTE
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — A proposed overhaul of Nebraska's collective bargaining process sailed through a legislative vote Friday with key support from Republican Gov. Dave Heineman.

The compromise bill marks the first major change in more than four decades to the Commission of Industrial Relations, a public-sector labor court. Lawmakers hailed the package as a landmark overhaul that preserves collective bargaining rights but helps cities and school districts control their budgets.

The measure was sponsored by Omaha Sen. Steve Lathrop, a Democrat in the officially nonpartisan Legislature, who shepherded the measure through nearly a year of talks with cities, unions, business groups and other stakeholders.

"The bill itself has — by anybody's measure — real, significant, comprehensive and meaningful change," Lathrop told lawmakers shortly before the vote. "It's fair, it's thoughtful, and I appreciate your support."

Public debate over the commission has intensified in recent months, after larger union battles erupted in Wisconsin and Ohio. Heineman, who had threatened to veto an earlier version of the bill, called the compromise measure "a victory for Nebraska taxpayers" and confirmed he would sign it when it reaches his desk next week.

"All sides compromised, and Nebraska taxpayers won," Heineman said in a written statement. "We did it the Nebraska way by working together."

Lathrop said the most significant changes would create a narrow range of wages for public employees, based on a midpoint average of what is paid by similar employers in similar areas. The wage range for workers would run from 98 percent to 102 percent of the midpoint, except during state recessions. If city employee wages were measured at



Heineman

95 percent of the midpoint, the commission could only order the wages up to 98 percent unless the city opted to increase them more. In cases where the wage difference was wider — less than 93 percent of the midpoint, or more than 107 percent — cities would have three years to bring their employees back

into range.

During a recession, the range would shift from 95 to 100 percent to help cities and school districts limit spending. Lathrop said the bill was tied to Nebraska's tax collections, and not the national economy, because the state tends to enter and exit recessions later than the rest of the country.

The measure aims to keep labor disputes out of commission hearings by pressuring both sides into a deal. Public employers and unions would have to disclose and vote publicly on final offers made by the other side. In the past, Lathrop said, elected officials have sent labor disputes to the commission to avoid politically difficult votes.

The compromise also would remove public-vs.-private wage comparisons, a provision that was designed to align government pay with market-driven private wages. Lathrop said public utilities were exempt.

Not everyone was satisfied with the plan. Lincoln Mayor Chris Beutler, a former state senator, said he was "extremely disappointed" that the private-sector wage comparisons were stripped out of the bill. Beutler said he supported the overall proposal, but without private wage comparisons, he said he could not assure the public that the bill would save taxpayers money.

Public unions cannot strike under Nebraska law but are allowed to bargain collectively. The Commission of Industrial Relations was created to resolve labor disputes that have reached an impasse.

The effort to reform the commission

began with talks with the League of Nebraska Municipalities and the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce. Lathrop spearheaded the talks, along with Omaha Sen. Brad Ashford and Hastings Sen. Dennis Utter.

Union leaders said they seldom file cases because they are costly and might produce an unfavorable ruling. They said preparing and presenting some cases can cost between \$30,000 and \$100,000 for surveys of comparable wages or benefits, expert witnesses and legal fees.

The bill also gives unions and employers more flexibility in deciding the array of governments they will use to compare wages.

Lincoln Sen. Tony Fulton, who opposed the earlier bill and tangled with Lathrop in floor debate, said the new proposal gives elected officials greater control of their budgets. The compromise bill may also ease the threat of a citizen ballot initiative to eliminate the commission, a possibility Heineman and others had mentioned earlier in the session.

Fulton and other senators credited Speaker of the Legislature Mike Flood, of Norfolk, for pushing the negotiations onward as the session neared its end. The bill had faced ongoing criticism that it fell short of cost-cutting reforms that cities and school districts needed.

"You know what makes Nebraska different?" Flood said. "We didn't have drums beating in the rotunda. We didn't have thousands of people camped out in tents. We didn't engage in hysteria. We sat across the table. We had heated discussions. We had differences of opinion. We had intelligent citizens of this state — whether from labor or management or the business community — make impassioned speeches based in fact and good-faith efforts to make the right policy happen in Nebraska."

The bill breezed Friday through a second-round vote, and requires one final reading before it advances to Heineman. The bill is LB 397.

Minn. Budget: Still Talking, But No Breakthrough

BY MARTIGA LOHN
Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — The gap between Democratic Gov. Mark Dayton and legislative Republicans on taxes and spending persisted Friday as they met twice for budget talks without a breakthrough.

GOP leaders seemed somewhat deflated as they emerged from an afternoon meeting with Dayton. They said they intend to keep the budget talks going for the remaining hours of the legislative session — which is required to end by midnight Monday — but didn't predict an on-time finish.

"I don't know that I would characterize it as progress," said Senate Majority Leader Amy Koch, when asked about the budget gap. "We continued the discussions and we got a little more understanding of where the governor was on his proposal, so I think it was just — I would just say productive."

"We're not going to give up," said House Speaker Kurt Zellers, R-Maple Grove. "We owe it to the people to be here every minute of every day trying to figure out how to get ourselves out of here by May 23."

Budget talks are scheduled to resume Saturday morning.

Minnesota has a projected \$5 billion deficit over the next two years. No deal by Monday would



Dayton

mostly from a new income tax bracket for the top 2 percent. Republicans won't consider those taxes and don't want to spend more than \$34 billion, the amount the state is projected to collect in the next two years.

"The impasse remains," Dayton said at a news conference at the Capitol earlier Friday.

The first-term governor rebuffed Republican leaders' attempt to steer the discussion toward spending cuts. A Republican budget plan would require about \$3.6 billion in cuts, while Dayton wants to cut only half that

amount. Koch said they asked Dayton during a morning meeting to outline specifics of where he would cut spending.

Dayton said the two sides should agree first on how much they have to spend.

"I'm not going to negotiate their side of the ledger when they're unwilling to negotiate my side of the ledger," he said.

Both sides agree on erasing the remaining portion of the deficit — \$1.4 billion — by extending a delay in school payments that goes back to 2009.

The first of a set of GOP budget bills — a K-12 schools spending package that makes up about two-fifths of the budget — landed on Dayton's desk Friday. The governor has three full days, not counting Sundays, to act on bills. That makes midnight Tuesday his deadline on the schools bill.

Dayton also spent several hours Friday in meetings with Republican lawmakers focused on the school bill and a budget for

state agencies, drilling down to policy details. Lawmakers handling negotiations on those issues came out of the meetings sounding upbeat.

"This is the best conversation we've had," said Sen. Mike Parry, R-Waseca, the Senate sponsor of the state agency bill.

Parry's House counterpart, Rep. Morrie Lanning, R-Moorhead, said he and Parry are prepared to move a compromise state agency bill through the Legislature if there's an overall budget deal.

Rep. Pat Garofalo, the House sponsor of the K-12 schools bill, predicted a "nice, safe, soft landing" for education once the larger budget issues are resolved but wouldn't speculate on the timing of an overall deal.

But the main divide didn't budge. Dayton repeated that he doesn't intend to agree to the Republican's preferred spending level.

"It's not responsible, it's not realistic and it's not going to happen," he said.

April Jobless Rate Steady At 4.2 % In Nebraska

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska's unemployment rate was an estimated 4.2 percent in April, unchanged from March, a state report said Friday.

The Nebraska Department of Labor report said the state rate a year ago was 4.8 percent and that the current rate of 4.2 percent was less than half the national rate of 9 percent in April.

Compared with other states, the April rate for Nebraska trailed only North Dakota's 3.4 percent.

The department said the three Nebraska sectors with the biggest April increases in jobs were leisure and hospitality (4,569 jobs), professional and business services (3,996 jobs) and mining and construction (3,307 jobs).

The number of unemployed in Nebraska dropped to 41,244 in April, compared with 41,778 in March, the state said, while the number of people holding jobs rose to 946,816 in April from 942,484 in March.

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Aneta Burrows
Dec. 30, 1960-Nov. 8, 2002
Your courage and bravery still inspire us all, and the memory of your smile fills us with joy and laughter.
Dan, Ann & Sarah

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- We hold you in our thoughts and memories forever.
- May God cradle you in his arms, now and forever.
- Forever missed, never forgotten. May God hold you in the palm of His hand.
- Thank you for the wonderful days we shared together. My prayers will be with you until we meet again.
- The days we shared were sweet. I long to see you again in Gods heavenly glory.
- Your courage and bravery still inspire us all, and the memory of your smile fills us with joy and laughter.
- Though out of sight, you'll forever be in my heart and mind.
- May the light of peace shine on your face for eternity.
- May God's angels guide you and protect you throughout time.
- You were a light in our life that burns forever in our hearts.
- May God's graces shine over you for all time.
- You are in our thoughts and prayers from morning to night and from year to year.
- We send this message with a loving kiss for eternal rest and happiness.
- May the Lord bless you with His graces and warm, loving heart.
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