

Effects Of N.D. Oil Boom Focus Of Conference

SPEARFISH (AP) — South Dakota business owners say they are ready to profit from the oil boom that's happening in neighboring North Dakota.

Representatives from several industries met in Spearfish on Wednesday to discuss how best to take advantage of North Dakota's oil industry at The Black Hills Bakken Conference.

Gas station owner Lavern Bills tells KOTA-TV that demand at his business has increased because of more traffic in the area.

Dennis Lindahl, a councilman in Stanley, N.D., says there is no end in sight to North Dakota's oil industry and surrounding states and communities should be prepared to handle some of the demands.

The conference continues Thursday at the Spearfish Holiday Inn Convention Center.

S.D. Guard Unit Returns From Afghanistan

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — More than 180 soldiers with the 200th Engineer Company of the South Dakota Army National Guard have returned to the United States after a year-long deployment to Afghanistan.

The unit deployed in May 2011 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Their job was to maintain, repair and replace existing military bridges throughout Afghanistan.

Members of company are from Pierre, Mobridge and Chamberlain. They will spend about a week at Fort Dix in New Jersey completing demobilization requirements before returning to South Dakota.

Dignitaries Cut Ribbon On New SD Card Center

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — South Dakota's governor and congressional delegation held a ribbon-cutting ceremony Wednesday to welcome a new credit card contact center in Sioux Falls.

Capital One in August announced the acquisition of the U.S. credit card arm of Britain's HSBC for \$2.6 billion. Capital One retained the 400 former HSBC employees and added 400 jobs in Sioux Falls as part of the acquisition.

The company has already hired 225 new associates.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard, Sens. Tim Johnson and John Thune, Rep. Kristi Noem, Attorney General Marty Jackley, Sioux Falls Mayor Mike Huether and Capital One U.S. Card president Ryan Schneider were on hand for the ceremony.

Barbara Stork, chairwomen of the Sioux Falls Chamber of Commerce, presented Capital One a plaque to welcome the company to Sioux Falls, the Argus Leader reported.

Johnson said the new jobs will include customer contact agents, supervisors, trainers, managers and support staff.

"These are high-quality jobs that will help keep South Dakota's economy growing," said Johnson, chairman of the Senate Banking Committee.

Huether said financial services jobs can be created in South Dakota because of visionaries such as former Governor Bill Janklow, who thought outside the box to help bring Citibank to Sioux Falls.

"Thousands of jobs were created because of leaders, visionaries and risk takers, and today all of us are reaping the rewards," Huether said.

Iowa Leaders Reach Education Deal

BY DAVID PITT
Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — Iowa lawmakers reported progress Wednesday in their talks over two large chunks of the state budget, as legislative leaders reported a deal on an education spending package and negotiators agreed to remove several disputed items from the health and human services budget.

Leaders didn't immediately release details about the tentative education agreement, but they said a bill could be ready for debate as early as Monday. Education spending represents more than \$850 million.

Meanwhile, conference committee members met to discuss the health and human services budget, which funds programs for public health, the elderly, food assistance, child support enforcement, Medicaid and mental health. It spends about \$1.6 billion.

Sen. Jack Hatch said the group made progress in its two meetings Wednesday and was expected to meet again Thursday.

"We have a couple of more meetings of work to do," he said. "We're moving forward."

House Speaker Craig Paulsen said once agreement is reached on those two areas of spending the remaining budget pieces should fall into place quickly.

The governor's office, the Republican-led House and the Democrat-controlled Senate generally agree on spending about \$6.24 billion from the state's general fund budget, up about 3.8 percent from the current year's budget. Contention usually stems from the underlying individual budgets, how money is allocated within them, and millions of dollars spent outside the general fund.

Other areas of the budget assigned to conference committees are administration and regulation, justice, economic development, the court system, and the Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Fund, which gets money from gambling and other sources and uses it to fix up state-owned buildings.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Gronstal, a

Democrat, said some of the groups were scheduled to meet Thursday and Friday.

"The good news is we're going to the drafting stage where people can take a look at that language and make a judgment," he said.

Gov. Terry Branstad's \$25 million education reform proposal also has been assigned to a committee.

Branstad has said that Iowa student test scores, once the best in the nation, have fallen to the middle of the pack. His proposal calls for tougher testing for students, and better training and evaluation of teachers. The House passed a bill with much of that included.

The Senate, however, removed a large portion. Legislative leaders are not certain the proposal, one of the governor's priorities for this session, will be part of the final package this year.

"I'm hopeful we could still do some bold reform, but time will tell," Paulsen said.

Gretna City Administrator Fired After Theft Report

GRETNA, Neb. (AP) — A theft allegation played a role in the Gretna City Council's decision to fire a top administrator who was already under scrutiny for her handling of city finances, the city attorney said Wednesday.

The council voted Tuesday to dismiss Colleen Lawry, 49, who had been with the city since 2004.

Lawry was arrested later Tuesday night on theft allegations, which were not related to questions raised last week by the state auditor about her spending.

City attorney John K. Green said the city learned Tuesday that Lawry was accused of taking about \$800 from the Gretna Senior Citizens Center. The money was part of a \$1,000 donation made to the center, which he said uses space in the City Hall basement but receives no taxpayer dollars.

Green said Lawry was in charge of the center's debit card connected to the account that held the donated money. She explained that her use of the center's debit card was a mistake. Lawry said that once she learned of her error, she had the purchases transferred to her personal bank debit card, and the bank verified her account, Green said.

The theft allegation came up during an executive session at Tuesday's meeting, Green said. He said the allegation may have been the final straw as the council deliberated her fate, but he declined to speak for the council members.

Lawry remained in custody on Wednesday. Her attorney didn't immediately return a call from The Associated Press.

In a letter to Gretna officials last week, state auditor Mike

Foley raised questions about the city's financial controls and about Lawry's spending in particular. The letter didn't mention the senior citizens center.

Foley said his auditing team found several instances in which Lawry used her city credit card for personal purchases. Even though she paid back the city, Foley said, state law bars personal purchases on a government card.

Lawry's travel spending also was criticized as being excessive, and Foley said Lawry didn't provide itemized receipts for much of it or adequate documentation to show the travel and expenses were necessary.

Citing a specific case, Foley said the audit showed Lawry put 18.9 gallons of fuel in her city-issued car, but the vehicle holds only 16.9 gallons.

The auditor raised a question

of nepotism regarding the hiring of Lawry's daughter to work as a receptionist for the city clerk and whether the council properly reviewed and approved the hiring and documented their votes for the public.

A letter released last week under Mayor Sally McGuire's name said Foley had raised some legitimate concerns that would be addressed. But, McGuire said, she viewed some contents of Foley's letter as an attack on the city and she emphasized that "not one penny of taxpayer money held by the city of Gretna was missing or misappropriated."

On Tuesday, the council adopted new policies that reflected Foley's recommendations.

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