

Omaha Police Investigate Shooting Death

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Omaha police are investigating the shooting death of a man, but few details are being released.

Police say an injured man was reported in southeast Omaha shortly before 6 a.m. Sunday.

The man wasn't responsive and had a gunshot wound. He was taken to the Nebraska Medical Center in critical condition, and he died later at the hospital.

Tourism Secretary Expects Strong Summer

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — Despite spring snowstorms, South Dakota's Secretary of Tourism Jim Hagen is confident the state will see an increase in summer tourism numbers.

Hagen told KELO-TV that South Dakota is not the only state that has seen spring snow. He said every survey his department has seen indicates people are ready to travel this summer.

"We are called the land of infinite variety and no doubt with the weather, we're staying true to that," he said.

Summer is the state's peak tourism season. And Hagen is no stranger to starting the busiest travel season in South Dakota under less than ideal conditions. Two years ago, a flood affected large areas of the state, but tourism still grew. Last summer also saw a 5 percent jump in visitors despite extreme heat and drought conditions.

Hagen said social media has helped his department get out the correct information to potential visitors.

"The great thing about social media platforms and other areas where you can go and say, 'Hey, let me correct some misinformation that may be out there about what we've experienced,'" Hagen said.

Lewis & Clark Eyes Ways To Complete Project

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — The Lewis & Clark Regional Water System's board is trying to complete the project first authorized in 2000 despite a dramatic drop in federal money the past two years.

The *Argus Leader* reports that the system was supposed to be distributing 45 million gallons of potable Missouri River water a day to 300,000 customers in South Dakota, Minnesota and Iowa by 2005.

Sioux Falls began receiving water last summer, but nine of Lewis & Clark's member communities and rural water systems have yet to be hooked up.

An almost chronic shortfall in its federal allocation has put construction far behind schedule.

Board members are divided on whether they should convert the \$100 million in remaining grants to a zero-interest loan that members would repay over 40 years.

2 Die In Fiery Crash In Southeast Nebraska

TECUMSEH, Neb. (AP) — Authorities believe alcohol may have contributed to a fiery crash in southeast Nebraska that killed two people.

The *Lincoln Journal Star* reports 41-year-old Terry Hasty of Pawnee City and 33-year-old Amanda Hernandez of Tecumseh were both killed in the crash Saturday.

The Johnson County Attorney's office says Hasty was speeding along Broadway at speeds over 80 mph when the accident happened.

The 2005 Ford Expedition Hasty was driving hit several mailboxes and struck a tree before catching fire.

Sheriff Scott Walton says alcohol was a factor in the crash.

Nebraska

Funding Debate Shows Ed. Pressures

BY GRANT SCHULTE
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — A fight for Nebraska school-aid dollars was driven heavily by large districts that have dwindling options to generate local revenue and small districts that pay more per-student for transportation and teachers.

Both sides won concessions, even though the tentative funding formula steers most of the state aid to Nebraska's largest schools. The largest schools around Omaha and Lincoln complained about flat-lined property values and larger student enrollments. Smaller schools worry about competing for teachers with Omaha, Lincoln and border states.

Of the 249 public districts in Nebraska, 114 will receive no equalization aid under the proposed funding formula. Those districts account for about 13 percent of all students statewide.

Jon Habben, executive director of the Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association, said millions of dollars in equalization-aid has flowed away from schools over the last five years. Rural districts along the western Nebraska border are also competing with Colorado and Wyoming for teachers, he said.

"You're trying to stay competitive," he said. "We're having trouble attracting teachers who will come to rural, community schools. Students graduate from larger places, and often they want to stay there. It's a major issue that we deal with, attracting and keeping good personnel, and our largest cost by far is teachers."

The new funding bill for Nebraska K-12 public schools won initial approval in April from lawmakers, who reached an agreement after a bitter debate over how districts should split the money. The bill must clear two more votes, including one as early as Tuesday.

In suburban Omaha, the Ralston Public Schools will see an estimated \$300,000 increase in state aid, for a total of about \$11.2 mil-

lion, said assistant superintendent Brad Dahl. But Dahl said some of that money would flow into Omaha's learning community, a group of 11 districts that share funding in an effort to improve performance in low-income urban schools.

Dahl said his schools will see a net decrease in the funding that districts receive for offering more class time and hiring better-educated teachers. The loss was due in part to a change in the bill that kept that aid for all Nebraska schools, he said.

Dahl said property values in the district haven't increased, and the district has reached its maximum levy of \$1.05 per \$100 of property value. The district has renegotiated contracts for food service and copy machines and held off on buying new textbooks. School administrators eliminated 50 staff members this year through attrition, an early retirement plan and layoffs.

"We can't generate any additional dollars," Dahl said. "That's

why we're in the position we're in. The only way for us to receive those additional dollars to keep up with the increased costs of health, teacher pay, and other expenses has to come through state aid."

The funding formula that distributes general aid to schools is based on land values and student enrollment. That formula favors larger, urban schools that have lower land values and larger student populations. Smaller districts with valuable, taxable farm land and declining student numbers receive less — but special-education funding goes to all schools that have special-needs students.

The proposal sets an average 5 percent annual increase in state aid for schools in the next two-year budget, to restore aid that was cut in previous years. It would cost the state \$908 million in the first year, and \$940 million in the second. It also would increase the local effort rate, which lets school districts offset state aid losses through local tax dollars.

The compromise measure also

retains key components of the school-funding formula that were initially cut. A provision that allows smaller, rural districts to qualify for aid if they have longer school years and more teachers with advanced degrees. Schools will receive the aid even if they don't otherwise qualify for school aid.

Stanton Public Schools Superintendent Micahel Sieh said he worries about a farm-land bubble that could cause a drop in prices in his 440-student district in northeast Nebraska. The formula is designed to adapt to property-value changes, but he said the growing political power in the Omaha and Lincoln areas could make it harder for smaller districts to get future state aid.

Sieh said his district has worked to build its rainy-day fund because state aid has become less predictable. Budget pressures have also prompted the district to postpone renovation projects, including a cracked sidewalk and a boiler that dates to 1953.

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