

Neb. Death-Penalty Repeal Stuck In Filibuster

BY GRANT SCHULTE
Associated Press

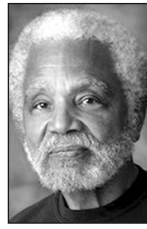
LINCOLN, Neb. — A proposal to abolish the death penalty in Nebraska appeared to be in jeopardy on Monday, despite a majority of lawmakers who signaled a willingness to end capital punishment in the state. Supporters of the repeal initiated a "test vote" on a procedural motion to kill the legislation, to publicly gauge their support in the 49-member Legislature. The vote showed that 26 senators supported repealing the death penalty, but lawmakers would need at least 30 votes to override the veto of Republican Gov. Dave Heineman, who supports the death penalty, and 33 votes to force an end to debate.

Lawmakers adjourned Monday evening without reaching a vote.

The repeal measure was introduced by long-time Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha, who has fought for nearly four decades to end capital punishment.

"People who support the death penalty from a distance don't know what a grotesque ceremony it is," Chambers said.

Chambers has proposed repealing the death-penalty each year between 1973 and 2008, when he was forced to sit out for four years because of new term limits. He was



Chambers

re-elected in 2012. His death penalty bill passed out of the Legislature once, in 1979, but was vetoed by then-Gov. Charles Thone.

The debate didn't fall neatly on party lines in the officially nonpartisan Legislature, which is dominated by Republicans.

Many Republicans who previously opposed the death penalty argued that efforts to carry out an execution have only led to expensive legal appeals. Some argued that even with the death penalty, Nebraska would never again follow through with an execution because of legal problems with sodium thiopental, a lethal-injection drug.

"I've been very pro-death penalty for most of my life, but I've come to the conclusion that it does not work," said Sen. Galen

Hadley, of Kearney.

Another Republican, Sen. Colby Coash of Lincoln, said the death penalty has kept constant news attention on the killers and served as a constant, painful reminder for their victims' families.

"My feeling is, we just need to put this to bed," Coash said. "We should never talk about these people again. Let them wear a hole in a 10-by-12 cell until they die."

Sen. Beau McCoy of Omaha, a death penalty supporter, said he believed the punishment was appropriate for what he described as "the most heinous crimes you can imagine."

Sen. Russ Karpisek, a Democrat from Wilber, added that the issue "shook me to my core" but that he ultimately remained in favor of the death penalty.

Nebraska has 11 men on death row. The last inmate executed in Nebraska was Robert E. Williams, who was electrocuted in 1997. Williams confessed to killing three women and trying to kill a fourth during a three-day rampage in 1977 that crossed into three states.

Maryland became the sixth state in as many years to repeal the death penalty earlier this month, when Democratic Gov. Martin O'Malley signed it into law. The other states — New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Illinois and New Mexico — tend to be less conservative than Nebraska. Nebraska is one of 32 states that have capital punishment.

Warmer Temperatures Help S. Dakota Farmers

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — Warmer weather across South Dakota helped farmers make good progress on their crops last week. The U.S. Department of Agriculture says in its weekly crop report that producers had on average 5.5 days suitable for fieldwork. Winter wheat conditions were rated 28 percent very poor, 33 percent poor, 34 percent fair, 5 percent good and 0 percent excellent. Calving was 90 percent complete and lambing was 91 percent complete. Cattle and calf conditions were rated 1 percent very poor, 5 percent poor, 24 percent fair, 62 percent good, and 8 percent excellent.

Heineman Vetoes Teacher Retirement Measure

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman has vetoed a teacher retirement bill, arguing that a proposed increase in the state's contribution is unsustainable. Heineman said Monday that he supports a short-term fix within the bill, but called on lawmakers to conduct a study of Nebraska's public-employee retirement system. The bill seeks to address projected shortfalls in the retirement plans for public school employees. The employee contribution would remain the same at nearly 10 percent, while the state's contribution would grow from 1 percent to 2 percent. Heineman says the increase would cost the state an additional \$20 million annually. Sen. Jeremy Nordquist says he will move to override. He says the bill was a compromise, and teacher and school-district contributions have increased 28 percent in recent years.

Anderson Appointed To S.D. House Of Reps.

PIERRE (AP) — Farmer and businessman David L. Anderson has been appointed to the vacant seat in the South Dakota House of Representatives. Gov. Dennis Daugaard announced Monday that he was appointed Anderson to represent District 16, which includes all of Union County and portions of Lincoln County. Anderson replaces Patty Miller, who resigned earlier this year. Anderson is the owner of Canton Insurance Agency and the president of the Farm Mutual Insurance Company of Lincoln County. He also farms near Hudson. Anderson says he is honored to serve the people of District 16 and looks forward to working with other elected officials.

SD Wildlife Officers Kill 4 Lions In Black Hills

KEYSTONE (AP) — State wildlife officers killed three mountain lions that had confronted dogs, strolled through yards and killed deer on city streets in the southwestern South Dakota community of Keystone. The Rapid City Journal reports that Game, Fish and Parks officers killed an adult female lion and two 40-pound kittens on May 5 and May 6. Regional wildlife manager John Kanta says Keystone is in the middle of lion habitat, and officials gave the lion a chance to move its kittens out of the city. But he says the mother lion didn't cooperate. Officers also killed a male lion at Angostura State Recreation Area near Hot Springs on May 6 because it was hanging out near a recreational trail, watching hikers and bikers.

Neb. Man Gets Jail For Hiding Son From Prison

SOUTH SIOUX CITY, Neb. (AP) — A Nebraska man has been given jail time for allowing his son to stay at his home after escaping from a minimum-security prison in South Dakota. Robert Thorngren, of South Sioux City, was sentenced Monday in Dakota County Court to 220 days in jail on a misdemeanor charge of accessory to a felony. He must pay a \$500 fine. The Sioux City Journal reports the 45-year-old Thorngren was arrested in March after his son, 30-year-old Travis Thorngren, went missing from South Dakota State Penitentiary in Sioux Falls. He had been serving a five-year sentence on a grand theft conviction in Lincoln County.

Seward Man Claims \$2 Million Powerball Prize

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A Seward man has stepped forward to claim his \$2 million Powerball Power Play prize. Nebraska Lottery officials said in a news release Monday that Lonnie White learned Thursday that he'd won. White says he stopped at the Gas N Snaks store on Jackson Avenue in Seward to check the results from Wednesday's drawing. White says that when the store clerk told him how much the Powerball ticket was worth, White said "Holy cow! I won!" The numbers were 21, 22, 26, 30, 57 and Powerball 27. White's ticket matched all but the Powerball number.

Sioux City Officer Returns To Where He Was Shot

SIOUX CITY, Iowa (AP) — A Sioux City police officer wounded last month during a traffic stop that led to a fugitive manhunt is back on patrol, returning to the spot where he was shot. Officer Kevin McCormick retraced his route Sunday on the west side of the city, Sioux City station KTVI reported. "What I'm trying to do here is determine just how much I can remember," he said. McCormick remembered the garbage cans and chain-link fence and the van he saw on April 29. He said he's been replaying the incident in his mind. He pulled over a car for a seat belt violation. As he was preparing to leave his cruiser, a man got out of the car and fired eight shots. A bullet that penetrated the cruiser's windshield struck McCormick above an eye. "Definitely, you feel a little bit out of sorts. I do have a little bit of heightened sensitivity, just recognizing as I'm looking at people right now, as I'm looking at cars. That guy could have a gun right now, and I don't know that, and if I initiate a traffic stop I could have the same darn thing that happened to me two weeks ago," he said.

Minnesota OKs Gay Marriage Legislation

BY PATRICK CONDON AND BRIAN BAKST
Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Minnesota is set to become the 12th U.S. state where gay couples can get married after a final legislative vote Monday that will let the weddings start on Aug. 1.

Democratic Gov. Mark Dayton has pledged to sign the bill, and scheduled a ceremony at 5 p.m. Tuesday on the front steps of the Capitol in St. Paul to do so.

Minnesota is now the first state in Midwest to legalize gay marriage by legislative vote, and the third nationwide in just 10 days, joining Rhode Island and Delaware. Thousands of gay marriage supporters thronging the Capitol erupted into deafening cheers after the Senate's 37-30 vote; the House passed it last week on a 75-59 vote. "Members, God made gays," Sen. Ron Latz, a Democrat from a suburb of Minneapolis, said during the Senate's emotional four-hour debate. "And God made gays capable of loving other people. So who are we to quarrel with God's intentions?"

The gay marriage issue shifted quickly in Minnesota, with the Legislature's vote coming a little more than six months after voters defeated an amendment that would have banned gay marriage in the state constitution. The groups that led the campaign against the amendment swiftly turned to pushing for legalizing same-sex marriage, an effort aided when Democrats captured full control of state government in November. Only one Republican senator, Braden Petersen of suburban Andover, voted for the bill. Three Democrats from rural districts voted against it. Republican opponents said the bill alters a centuries-old understanding of marriage as a societal building block that benefits children. "Forcing others to give you your rights will never end well," said Sen. Dan Hall, a Republican and a pastor. "It won't give you the recognition you desire." Hall said gay marriage supporters have told him he's on the wrong side of history but, he said, "the truth is I'm more concerned about being on the right side of eternity."

But supporters, too, cited religious faith and with relationships with gay family members and friends in shaping their vote for the bill. Many spoke of the benefits of their own marriages. "I could never and I would never deny the kind of recognition and all the other positive things I get out of my marriage with my husband, to anyone else," said Sen. Vicki Jensen, a Democrat from the southern Minnesota city of Owatonna. Republican opponents argued that the bill's provisions meant to protect religious freedom were insufficient, raising concerns it could



BRIAN PETERSON/MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE/MCT
Gay marriage supporters react after the passage of a bill legalizing same-sex marriage Monday in St. Paul, Minn.

force merchants in the wedding industry to accept business from gay couples even if the merchants object to such marriages. "We must respect religious freedom at the same time as we ad-

vance rights," said Sen. Carla Nelson, R-Rochester. "This bill does not do that."

Still, with passage looking inevitable Monday, vocal and visual opposition was muted. Don Lee, of

Eagan, placed a tombstone on the Capitol lawn with the words "R.I.P. MARRIAGE 2013."

"The legislation being passed today is the end of marriage as we know it in Minnesota," Lee said. "It's a transformation from a forward-looking sacrificial institution to one focused on adult desires."

St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman ordered the Wabasha Street Bridge near downtown festooned in rainbow-striped gay pride flags, and temporarily renamed it the "Freedom to Marry Bridge." He also proclaimed it "Freedom to Marry Week."

Minnesota's most famous opponent of gay marriage also weighed in. U.S. Rep. Michele Bachmann, an ardent supporter of banning gay marriage when she served in the state Senate, released a statement expressing disappointment in a vote she said "denies religious liberty to people who believe in traditional marriage."

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