

Union County Debates Dispatch Center

SIoux FALLS (AP) — Voters in Union County will soon decide whether to keep a local dispatch center that handles 911 calls.

The *Argus Leader* reports that the opt-out measure on the June 3 ballot has led to a debate about the importance of local control in rural southeast South Dakota.

County commissioners say the center's cost is too high to maintain long-term. Taxpayers put in more than \$390,000 in 2013 for the center's operations.

But Sheriff Dan Limoges says the dispatch hub is the "brain center" of the community and its loss could leave 911 callers waiting longer for help.

Neighboring dispatchers would answer Union County emergency calls if the center shuts down.

Should the measure pass, \$16.50 a year would be added to the property taxes of a \$100,000 home.

Route Offered For Norfolk Gas Pipeline

NORFOLK, Neb. (AP) — Black Hills Energy has been meeting with landowners along the likely route of a new natural gas pipeline that supporters say will ease the capacity problem at Norfolk.

Regulators have approved a 50-mile line that will run from the Northern Natural Gas interstate pipeline at Bancroft. It would allow the area to receive natural gas from multiple pipelines to serve existing and future customers, especially businesses.

The line will supply natural gas to Houston-based Tejas Tubular Products among other customers, the *Norfolk Daily News* reported. Tejas Tubular has said it plans to build a plant next year near Nucor Steel that would bring about 200 new jobs to the area.

Pipeline construction is expected to begin as soon as weather permits in spring 2015. Gas should be flowing by November 2015.

Easements from landowners are being negotiated for 20 feet on each side of the line plus 35 feet of temporary easement during construction. Black Hills Energy wants to bury the line down 5 feet and will work with counties to ensure a 3-foot minimum under the bottom of a ditch and at least 10 feet under a creek bed.

Most of the line will be north of and parallel to Nebraska Highway 51 and U.S. Highway 275, Black Hills Energy officials have said.

"In the coming weeks, we'll continue to talk with landowners and work on finalizing the route," said Jeff Sylvester, vice president for gas operations in Nebraska. "There are surveyors out in the area, and we'd like to remind people to be aware of them as they're driving in the area."

Inmate's Wife Arrested For Trespassing

SIoux FALLS (AP) — The wife of an inmate has been arrested on trespassing and other charges after she was found having sex with her husband on the grounds of the South Dakota State Penitentiary in Sioux Falls.

Authorities on Monday said 28-year-old Rebecca Bordeaux was arrested Saturday. She's facing charges of trespassing and intent to deliver unauthorized articles to an inmate. The latter is a felony punishable by up to two years in prison.

Department of Corrections officials say the incident happened in an unsupervised area of the penitentiary where inmates on community service are allowed. They say the couple was found at a wood pile that is used by Native American inmates for sweat lodges. Another inmate was found with the couple.

Officials say a citizen reported the incident to the penitentiary.

Trial Date Set For Woman In Killings

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A trial date has been set for the sister of an Omaha man convicted of killing four people.

Douglas County District Judge Peter Bataillon on Monday set a Sept. 22 start date for Erica Jenkins' trial. She has pleaded not guilty to charges including first-degree murder and two counts of criminal conspiracy and use of a weapon.

Jenkins is the sister of Nikko Jenkins. Nikko Jenkins was found guilty in April of killing Curtis Bradford, Jorge Cajiga-Ruiz, Juan Uribe-Pena and Andrea Kruger over 10 days last August.

On Monday, Erica Jenkins waived her right to a speedy trial on three counts of assaulting correctional officers or inmates. The *Omaha World-Herald* reports Erica Jenkins' attorney also said his client was uncomfortable wearing both shackles and a stun belt.

Neb. Econ. Development Chief Resigns

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska's economic development director and state labor commissioner has resigned to take a private sector job.

Catherine Lang will leave state government next month after more than three decades of service. Gov. Dave Heineman announced her resignation on Monday and praised her work.

The 57-year-old Lang has worked in state government since 1981. She was appointed Commissioner of Labor in August 2008, after serving as deputy tax commissioner. She was named director of the Department of Economic Development in 2011, and has worked in both roles since that time.

Both agencies have worked on efforts to find jobs for veterans. During Lang's tenure, the Department of Economic Development opened a trade office in China.

Lang earned her bachelor's and law degrees from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

South Dakota

Tech-School Cap Scrapped

BY BOB MERCER
State Capitol Bureau

The state Board of Education eliminated a fees cap for students at South Dakota's four technical institutes Monday.

The cap limited fees for payment of lease purchase agreements to 20 percent of total tuition and fees.

The board took its action during a meeting at Northern State University in Aberdeen. State Department of Education official Tiffany Sanderson said the repeal was necessary.

She said part of the reason was additional funding provided by the Legislature, at the governor's recommendation, to offset a tuition increase for the coming school year.

Sanderson said the repeal also was needed because of the long-term plan to continue raising fees for new facilities and improvements at the campuses.

The institutes are at Watertown, Mitchell, Rapid City and Sioux Falls.

The repeal didn't face any opposition.

"No written public comments were received," said Don Kirkegaard of Sturgis, the board's president.

No one testified at the public hearing held by the board Monday. None of the board members had anything to say either.

The next stop for the repeal is the Legislature's rules review committee. The panel's six members will decide whether the repeal can proceed.

In March the board kept tuition at \$104 per credit hour, a result of the \$1 million in additional funding, but raised two fees by a total of \$4. That puts tuition and fees at \$137 per credit hour for the coming school year.

The state board is shifting to a new system where each campus would keep the maintenance and repair money raised from its students. The long-term target is spending 2 percent of the property value.

The \$3 maintenance and repair fee brought in \$496,685 in the fiscal 2013 year that ended last June, according to the state Bureau of Finance and Management. The fee increases to \$4 for the coming year.

To reach the 2 percent goal, the maintenance and repair fee revenues would need to reach approximately \$3.9 million, based on the 2013 values for the buildings at the four campuses.

That means the \$4 fee would need to more than quintuple, and inflation would require further increases.

The facility fee has increased annually for at least four years. It was \$11 per credit hour in the 2009-2010 academic year and has been gradually raised to \$25 per credit hour for the current school year. The facility fee will be \$28 per credit hour for the 2014-2015 year.

The board didn't receive any public comments during a hearing Monday on new standards for physical education.

There will be additional public hearings at Rapid City and Pierre later this year on the proposed standards.

Board Wants Tech Schools To Reach A Consensus

BY BOB MERCER
State Capitol Bureau

The state Board of Education delivered a message to the presidents of South Dakota's public technical institutes Monday: Find agreement on adding and expanding programs.

Otherwise, the board will become more involved and develop a longer and more detailed process of determining which schools offer various degrees.

The board's position comes in the wake of a dispute in March.

Mitchell Technical Institute's leadership opposed the addition of an electrician program at Southeast Technical Institute in Sioux Falls that Gov. Dennis Daugaard favored.

Board president Don Kirkegaard of Sturgis suggested Monday that program additions and expansions be proposed at one meeting and decided at the following meeting.

"It just seems like a good practice to follow," he said.

Board member Glenna Fouberg of Aberdeen agreed. "It makes sense to me," she said.

The long-time practice has been that the board considers and approves new programs at one meeting. There have been instances where the board delayed its decision because of questions.

The two presidents who had been at odds two months ago, STI's Jeff Holcomb and MTT's Greg Von Wald, joined forces and pushed back Monday.

The presidents said they need flexibility so they can better respond to local employers. They noted the board typically meets every two months and that wouldn't allow sufficient time in some instances.

"We just got out of the box," Von Wald said about the March matter. "We think it's fine the way it is."

Board member Richard Gowen of Rapid City drew the line.

Gowen, a former president of two state universities, said the presidents can work together as a group or the board will step in.

"It's up to you. It's in your hands," he told them. "Your call."

Child Welfare Money Neb. Owes Reduced To \$15M

BY GRANT SCHULTE
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — State officials have reduced the amount that Nebraska owes the federal government for child welfare services that weren't properly documented, but could still end up paying \$15 million.

A Department of Health and Human Services spokesman said Monday that the agency has successfully documented \$7 million of the \$22 million in federal aid that was distributed to private groups for foster care and other child welfare services.

Federal officials called for reimbursement in January after noting that Nebraska failed to properly track payments made as part of its troubled effort to privatize child welfare services.

Nebraska didn't require its child-welfare contractors to give a breakdown of how much money was going to foster parents versus other services for neglected and abused children, federal officials said in a January letter to Nebraska

DHHS officials. A review of 40 foster-care payments in fiscal years 2011 and 2012 found that the state didn't comply with federal rules in at least half of the cases, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The letter said Nebraska officials improperly included non-allowable expenses, such as their contractors' administrative costs, in their payment claims.

DHHS spokesman Russ Reno said the agency has proposed a payment schedule to the federal government, but likely won't begin reimbursing until later this summer. Reno said department officials were able to document about \$7 million in allowable expenses from the child service providers. But he said it's unlikely the state will be able to document any more expenses.

"At this point, I don't think we have any expectation of doing that," he said.

State Auditor Mike Foley said his office hasn't followed up with the department since he announced in January that state officials had received the letter. Foley, who is leaving of-

ice in January, said the office's staff will review the child welfare payments again during the department's annual audit. Foley has said the department could face annual interest fees of more than 10 percent if it fails to repay the money right away.

"It's up to them now to work it out with the feds," Foley said.

The privatization experiment faced problems shortly after it began in 2009, when the state hired five lead agencies to provide services for abused, neglected and troubled children who were in state care. Four of the five providers ended or lost their contracts with the state, citing a lack of funding and an unsustainable number of children in the system. The state has since restored its public child-welfare services everywhere except in the Omaha area.

Kerry Winterer, the department's CEO, has said the payment-tracking problems were due to inadequate documentation from the private agencies, and the problems have since been fixed.

Benoit

From Page 1

an interim president to serve the college during the search for new leadership," Sister Penny Bingham, prioress of Sacred Heart Monastery and a Board of Trustees member, stated in a media release.

"We thank Dr. Benoit for the work done during his three years at the college, and we

wish him and his family well."

A message left by the *Press & Dakotan* for Tom Harmon, the chair of the school's Board of Trustees, was not returned by press time Monday.

Benoit was formerly the dean of the University of North Dakota's Graduate School and had also been a professor for the Department of Pharmacology, Physiology and Therapeutics. Mount Marty College hired

him after a year-long search to replace Dr. James Barry, who resigned in April 2010.

In addition to its Yankton campus, Mount Marty College has a campus in Watertown, and a Sioux Falls campus that is home to its Nurse Anesthesia program.

You can follow Nathan Johnson on Twitter at twitter.com/AnInlandVoyage. Discuss this story at www.yankton.net/.

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