

### South Dakota's Credit Rating Upgraded

PIERRE (AP) — A national credit rating agency has upgraded South Dakota to the highest rating it issues.

The New York-based Standard and Poor's on Monday cited the state's "consistently strong" financial position and record of "conservative budgeting" in upgrading the state from "AA+" to "AAA."

South Dakota joins 15 other states that have also been given the agency's highest rating.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard says he's "very pleased" with the upgrade. The governor says his administration has met with ratings agencies and has put forward policies and practices to help secure the rating.

Credit ratings give potential bond purchasers a measurement of state performance and credit worthiness.

Daugaard's office says upgrades typically allow issued bonds to carry a lower interest rate, providing interest savings to issuers such as the South Dakota Building Authority.

### Judge: Berget To Keep Lawyer For Appeals

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — A judge has dismissed a motion from the state who argued death row inmate Rodney Berget needs a new attorney for his appeals process.

The *Argus Leader* reports Judge Doug Hoffman ruled Berget could keep Jeff Larson as his lawyer. Larson represented Berget throughout his trial.

Berget was sentenced to die this week for his role in killing a State Penitentiary guard. His execution is on hold.

Assistant Attorney General Paul Swedlund argued that keeping Larson could create conflicts if Berget wants to claim he had poor representation.

Larson said those claims were mute since Berget has never claimed to be dissatisfied and has always asked Larson to represent him.

Hoffman agreed but said in his ruling that state law prohibits Berget from raising questions later about his representation.

### Lower Brule Dispute Moves To Court

PIERRE (AP) — Two Lower Brule Sioux tribal councilmembers are petitioning a tribal court to stop the man who has taken over as acting chairman in place of the late Michael Jandreau.

Terry Pechota is an attorney for Councilmen Orville Langdeau and John McCauley. He says he expects the petition that demands recent actions by acting chairman Kevin Wright be invalidated to arrive at the tribal court Monday.

Since taking over, Wright has pushed for staffing changes and has urged the federal government to freeze fund transfers until sufficient oversight over the tribe's finances has been established.

The motion says Wright has been acting as chairman illegally and that his actions aren't valid.

Wright says the move is "ludicrous."

Langdeau didn't immediately respond to a request for comment. McCauley declined to comment.

### 2 Of 4 Teens Admit To Huron Vandalisms

HURON (AP) — Two of four juveniles in Huron accused of vandalizing more than 100 vehicles in less than a week have owned up to their crimes.

Beadle County States Attorney Mike Moore tells KOKK-AM all four are facing charges of third-degree burglary, intentional damage to property and ingesting a substance for the purpose of becoming intoxicated.

Huron Police arrested the four male juveniles in April following a traffic stop.

Police say the boys were found in the car with a cash register, BB guns and BBs. The cash register had been reportedly stolen from a local grocery store the night before.

Moore says two of the four teenagers admitted to the accusations against them last week an initial appearance. They're to be sentenced Wednesday.

### RC Schools Close Briefly After Concern

RAPID CITY (AP) — Four schools in Rapid City that were temporarily closed are back open following the discovery that a man in the area was carrying a cellphone and not a handgun.

Rapid City Police spokesman Brendyn Medina says the four elementary schools on the north side of the city had been locked Monday while police searched the area for what was reported to be a man on a bicycle with a black handgun.

Medina says police found the man and after talking with him determined that no crime had been committed.

The schools that had been locked down include North Middle School and General Beadle, Knollwood Heights and Horace Mann elementary schools.

Medina says classes continued while police searched the area.

### Neb. Sens. OK Livestock Development

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska counties looking to expand livestock operations could receive extra funds for planning and improving infrastructure under a bill that cleared a first-round vote in the Legislature.

Senators voted 37-0 Monday on a measure by Sen. Ken Schilz of Ogallala that would funnel \$1.5 million to counties approved by the Nebraska director of agriculture as livestock friendly.

Schilz says the measure puts the control in the hand of local authorities to seek out the livestock friendly designation and apply for grants.

During debate, some senators tried to expand the bill to other agricultural operations, with specific emphasis on certified organic food systems. But Schilz says broadening the language could detract from the emphasis on livestock development.

# Survey: States Spent Heavily To Clear Winter Snow And Ice

BY BOB SALSBERG  
Associated Press

BOSTON — Winter's full fury arrived late in much of the country but once it did it was relentless, quickly exhausting snow removal budgets and pushing the resources of state transportation agencies to their limit as they fought to keep highways safe and passable, according to a first-of-its-kind survey.

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials said 23 states reported combined spending of more than \$1 billion on winter maintenance operations and 8 million work hours plowing or treating state roads from October to March.

The states that responded to Monday's survey, obtained in advance by The Associated Press, also went through 6 million tons of salt and other huge quantities of brine and liquid deicing chemicals. One state reported using 216,000 gallons of beet juice, which can help salt stick to road surfaces.

"This winter the storms just came one on top of the other and there wasn't time in between to replenish your salt piles and give your folks some time off," said Rick Nelson, coordinator of the association's Snow and Ice Cooperative Program.

A single season snowfall record was broken in Boston, with virtually all the 110 inches coming in a six-week stretch from late January to early March when temperatures rarely rose above freezing.

"In January we were talking about what we were going to do with the surplus snow and ice funds," recalled Thomas Tinlin, Massachusetts' highway administrator. The Department of Transportation wound up spending \$154 million on winter maintenance, well above its \$107 million annual budget. Additional money was appropriated to assure the state's private snow plow contractors got paid.

Massachusetts used 600,000 tons of salt and 1.6 million gallons of liquid deicer. Crews removed 17.5 billion cubic feet of snow from state roadways, equivalent to 40 times the volume of dirt excavated during the massive Boston highway project known as the Big Dig, state officials noted.

Pennsylvania, which budgeted \$203 million for winter maintenance based on a five-year average of previous expenditures, spent \$272 million to keep traffic flowing on the state's 40,000 miles of roadway, according to Erin Waters-Trasatt, a transportation spokeswoman.

Pennsylvania also was among several states that sent crews and equipment to help out in Massachusetts, she said.

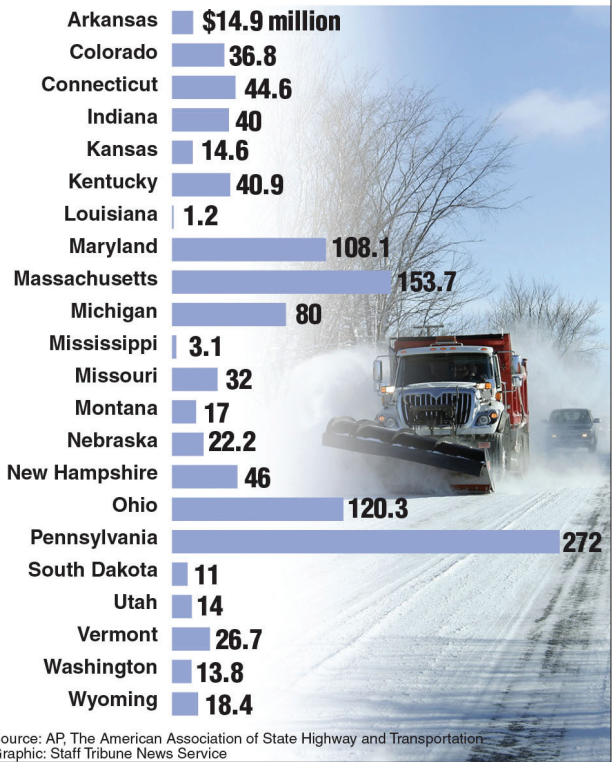
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## High cost of clearing snow

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### Among states reporting spending



Source: AP, The American Association of State Highway and Transportation  
Graphic: Staff Tribune News Service

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"Normally we don't budget for ice and snow because we don't get it that often," said Melinda McGrath, executive director of the Mississippi Department of Transportation. But recent winters have

brought several dangerous ice storms to the south, and this year Mississippi spent \$3.1 million, used 887 tons of salt and devoted 64,704 work hours to keep state roads safe.

An even larger and longer-term expense, McGrath said, are potholes. It's a universal headache for motorists and highway officials as freezing and melting cycles cause pavement to expand then crack. Maryland was among several other states reporting a large increase in potholes this spring.

The actual taxpayer cost of winter road maintenance was much higher than measured by the survey. Not all states responded and the expenses incurred by municipalities for plowing local roads was seen as comparable to state governments.

Unlike the previous winter, AASHTO said there were no serious shortages of salt this year.

When lawmakers and the general public consider transportation funding, winter maintenance needs can often be overlooked said Bud Wright, the group's executive director.

"When we think about funding transportation we need to consider the total amount needed to keep people and goods moving throughout the entire year," he said.

States are prohibited from using federal highway funds for snow and ice removal, but some sought federal disaster assistance to offset costs.

President Barack Obama approved disaster declarations for Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut for a January blizzard, making those states eligible for 75 percent reimbursement. But a broader request from Massachusetts to consider all the major storms a cumulative disaster was denied.

### Nebraska

# Personal Property Tax Break For Neb. Businesses Advances

BY GRANT SCHULTE  
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Nebraska farmers and business owners could get a property tax break under a bill advanced by lawmakers on Monday.

Senators gave first-round approval to an exemption for personal business property, despite criticism from some that lawmakers were taking a "whack-a-mole" approach with tax policies that benefit few people.

The measure would allow business owners to exempt the first \$10,000 worth of tangible property used in their operations, for an average tax savings of \$162. The bill would apply to farm equipment such as irrigation pivots and tractors, and business equipment such as rail cars, pipelines and factory machines.

Lawmakers advanced the measure on a 29-0 vote, after reducing the size of the exemption so it wouldn't consume such a large share of the budget. The watered-down version would cost the state \$19.6 million a year.

"It's a start in the right direction," the bill's sponsor, Sen. Mike Gloor of Grand Island, said. "We'll see how this works. If it's a successful program and those dollars are helpful to businesses, we can always add more."

Some senators said they supported the measure, but argued the Legislature hasn't done enough this year to pass broad-based tax cuts.

"Our efforts this year seem to be reactive and short-sighted," said Sen. John McCollister of Omaha. "Reducing taxes is a good thing, but our effort in this regard should be purposeful and fit into a long-term strategy."

McCollister said lawmakers keep approving tax exemptions for specific goods and services, which he referred to as a "whack-a-mole" tax policy. He said that makes it more difficult to cut taxes for all residents.

Gloor, who is chairman of the Revenue Committee, said lawmakers have followed a long-term approach to incrementally cut taxes each year. He said he introduced the bill in response to 2013 research from the Legislature's Tax Modernization Committee, which found that most of Nebraska's neighboring states have passed laws to chip away at personal property taxes.

Nebraska school districts along with counties and other local governments collected nearly \$218 million in personal property taxes last year out of the \$3.5 billion that was paid on all property.

Gloor pointed to other tax reforms advanced this year, including an extra

\$60 million a year in the budget to offset property taxes. That amount could grow by another \$4 million if lawmakers follow the recommendations of the Appropriations Committee.

If those budget items and Gloor's bill win approval, Nebraska property owners would see a collective \$224 million tax reduction.

Sen. Al Davis of Hyannis said the legislation doesn't fully address the challenges facing farmers and ranchers, who may have to pay taxes on \$500,000 worth of agricultural equipment. Davis said the state's rural property tax struggles are largely driven by the lack of state equalization aid for rural K-12 schools.

"We need to address the ag problem, and we haven't done it," Davis said. "It's got to be fixed at some point. We can't kick the can down the road very much longer."

Sen. Dan Hughes of Venango said the bill represents a "baby step" toward lowering taxes, but doesn't go far enough. Hughes, a farmer and small business owner, said the measure would net him a tax savings of a little more than \$100.

"This is a pittance," Hughes said. "This is not much money in the pockets of the industry that drives this state."

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