

South Dakota

Lawmakers Evaluate Road And Bridge Proposals

BY JAMES NORD
Associated Press

PIERRE — Lawmakers tasked with studying how to best fund hundreds of millions of dollars in necessary repairs to highways and bridges on Thursday started reviewing proposals to present to the Legislature.

Those plans include increasing taxes and user fees to put more toward South Dakota's deteriorating state and local roads. A quarter of state roads are projected to be in poor condition by 2024 — a 23 percentage point jump over now.

The Highway Needs and Financing Committee plans to finalize its recommendations on Friday, Republican Sen. Mike Vehle, chairman of the committee, outlined a draft proposal on Thursday that would authorize more than \$100

million in new revenue in its first year through a variety of fuel taxes, vehicle fees and other assessments. Vehle said the proposal that comes out of the committee will look different than the comprehensive plan discussed on Thursday, but one thing is certain — the recommendation won't come close to fully addressing the problem.

Some local governments have simply abandoned maintaining some roads in recent years. Counties have identified a more than \$80 million funding increase needed for 2015 for infrastructure repairs, while state highways need a more than \$140 million hike. To fund necessary county bridge replacements would cost more than \$240 million overall.

"Are we going to be able to do that? No," Vehle said. "But we have to start a plan."

Included in Vehle's framework proposal was an increase in a vehicle excise tax projected to raise about \$25.3 million, a fuel tax expected to raise \$50 million and a hike in vehicle registration fees expected to raise about \$8.7 million, to name a few.

The state's gas tax has been at 22 cents per gallon since 1999. Farm, retailer and construction interests all agreed in testimony that funding increases for road maintenance are necessary — and they acknowledged it would require higher taxes — but said more work on the details was necessary. Vehle and those groups were frank about the difficulties they would face passing tax increases through the South Dakota Legislature.

"I don't care how conservative you are," Vehle said. "We have to maintain our (infrastructure)."

Ricketts, Heineman Meet To Discuss Transition

BY GRANT SCHULTE
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — As he prepared to make the transition to the Nebraska governor's office in January, Pete Ricketts met with Gov. Dave Heineman Thursday at the Capitol to talk about the state budget process, personnel issues and other matters related to the office's day-to-day operations.

Besides visiting with the outgoing governor, Ricketts said he has called newly elected senators to congratulate them after Tuesday's election. Ricketts said he expected a smooth transition from Heineman, a fellow Republican who is leaving office after a decade.

"We've got a lot of work to do, no doubt," Ricketts said while standing next to Heineman for a media photo shoot in the governor's office.

Ricketts also announced

he will appoint Matt Miltenberger, his campaign manager, as his gubernatorial chief of staff. His deputy campaign manager, Taylor Gage, will serve as the transition team's communications director.

Ricketts said he planned to listen to Heineman on what the state's priorities should be. Heineman, the state's longest-serving governor, said he's confident that Ricketts will hit the ground running.

"Pete's a good friend, and I believe he'll be an outstanding governor for this state," Heineman said. "He's got the background of business, in terms of job creation — something that I've really focused on. He's going to take it to the next level."



Ricketts



Heineman

The transition marks the first major changing-of-the-guard in 16 years. Heineman was appointed lieutenant governor under then-Gov. Mike Johanns in 2001. He moved from that position to the governor's office in January 2005, after Johanns left to become U.S. Agriculture Secretary under President George W. Bush.

Heineman and Ricketts said they haven't yet discussed who will appoint a senator to replace Republican Charlie Janssen, of Fremont. Janssen was elected state auditor on Tuesday and will have to resign from his legislative seat. Janssen's legislative term expires in 2017.

Ricketts defeated Democrat Chuck Hassebrook, a former University of Nebraska

regent from Lyons, in Tuesday's election. He will be sworn in as Nebraska's 40th governor on Jan. 8.

Miltenberger previously worked for the Nebraska Ethanol Board, as executive director of the Nebraska Republican Party and as a lobbyist for the Las Vegas Sands Corporation. He will replace Larry Bare, who served as Nebraska's gubernatorial chief of staff since 1999.

Before he worked in Ricketts' campaign, Gage served as political director for Republican U.S. Sen. Deb Fischer's 2012 campaign. Heineman's communications director, Jen Rae Wang, has served the governor since 2007.

The transition team also unveiled a new website on Thursday, <http://governor-elect.nebraska.gov>, for anyone who is seeking an appointment in the new administration.

Capitol Glass Shards For Window For Gov. Residence

PIERRE (AP) — Scraps of century-old stained glass from the South Dakota Capitol aren't going to waste.

Glass shards left over after a recently completed \$3 million renovation project were made into a single window that will be put in the governor's residence, the *Capitol Journal* reported.

The stained glass was installed in the Capitol in 1909. About 4,400 square feet of glass in the Capitol dome, the barrel vault above the grand staircase, and above the House and Senate chambers was removed earlier this year and sent to Conrad Schmitt Studios in Wisconsin to be cleaned and refurbished. The reinstallation of the glass wrapped up in September, concluding a project in which artists and craftsmen invested about 35,000 hours.

Mike Mueller, special projects coordinator for the state Bureau of Administration, came up with the idea to use leftover glass

pieces in a window for the governor's residence to add some history to the home, which was built only about a decade ago.

State history and symbols are worked into the window. They include a rose quartz stone, which is the state mineral; a Fairburn agate, the state gemstone; an image of a honeybee, the state insect; an image of a pasque flower, the state flower; and the state seal.

Another image is 32 leaves in a wreath of colored glass — indicating that Gov. Dennis Daugaard, who was re-elected Tuesday, is the state's 32nd governor, Mueller said.

The window is on temporary display in the governor's office in the Capitol and the public is welcome to come and see it, Mueller said. It will be installed in the governor's residence sometime after Christmas, on the second floor where it will add color to the sunlight thrown on a chandelier, he said.

Nebraska

Ex-Teacher Facing Suspension For Changing Statewide Tests

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A former fourth-grade teacher in northeastern Nebraska is facing a yearlong suspension from teaching for correcting punctuation and capitalization errors on some of her students' statewide writing tests.

Michelle Jacobsen, who was also the district assessment coordinator for Allen Consolidated Schools, resigned in August after a school investigation showed she made the changes on eight of her students' rough draft portions of the test.

The exam for fourth-graders is a two-day process. Students first write rough drafts and then write their responses to a prompt in the test booklet.

In January, a student's mother called a principal, saying that her son told her that Jacobsen changed his rough draft, according to documents filed with the Nebraska Department of Education's professional practices commission.

School officials investigated and found that Jacobsen had altered tests the year

before too. Officials say Jacobsen admitted to changing the tests because she felt pressure for her students to do well.

Exam results are published in the annual "State of the Schools" report and are sent to the federal education department, the *Lincoln Journal Star* reported. Allen school officials notified the state about the incident, and the district's fourth-grade writing tests results were tossed.

A phone number listed for a Michelle Jacobsen in Allen was out of service.

The professional practices commission voted in October to recommend a yearlong suspension of Jacobsen's teaching certificate. The state's education board will vote Friday on whether to approve the suggested penalty.

Allen school officials said in a report to the state education department that they were disappointed in Jacobsen's actions. They said they pride themselves on "being a district that holds professionalism and integrity in high regards."

Teen Says He Thought He Killed Goblin, Not Brother

LOGAN, Iowa (AP) — An Iowa teenager testified that when he killed his 5-year-old foster brother, he was in a fantasy world and thought he was killing a goblin.

Cody Metzker-Madsen told a western Iowa courtroom that he visits a world only he can reach whenever he plays with someone. He said he didn't realize until afterward that what he thought was a goblin was actually his foster brother, Dominic Elkins.

"I loved the little guy, I would never hurt him," Metzker-Madsen said during his testimony that lasted more than 40 minutes Wednesday.

His lawyer is using an insanity defense, The *Des Moines Register* reported. Authorities say Metzker-Madsen killed Dominic last year while the two were playing outside of their home near Logan. Metzker-Madsen was 17 when the boy's body was found at the bottom of a ravine.

An autopsy showed he died of blunt-force head injuries and drowning.

Metzker-Madsen said the two were playing a game that involved Roman mythology in the backyard. He said he

went to his own world, which has slightly different colors and smells than the real world, and saw an army of "green, ugly little creatures."

He said the goblins were fighting people he knew and that the scene was similar to a video game he played.

He said he didn't know it was Dominic when he pushed his head into the water at the bottom of the ravine while hitting him with a brick.

Prosecutors noted that Metzker-Madsen provided different stories for why Dominic died and was able to lead his foster family to the body. During cross-examination, he said he told varying versions of his story based on symbols he saw on top of people's heads that indicated whether he could trust them.

Metzker-Madsen also faces an assault charge after authorities say he bit a Harrison County jailer on Tuesday. He testified in court that he only remembers "bits and pieces" of the incident.

His attorney said he couldn't comment on the additional charge.

2014 Baitfish Population Rebounds In Lake Oahe

PIERRE (AP) — Baitfish rebounded in Lake Oahe this year, but the population remains smaller than it was before the 2011 Missouri River flood.

The lake had a good hatch of lake herring and a decent crop of rainbow smelt this year, South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks biologist Mark Fincel told the *Capital Journal*. That led to an estimated cold-water baitfish population of nearly 42 million in the Missouri River reservoir in the Dakotas.

Baitfish are important because they provide food for game fish such as walleyes that are sought by anglers.

A lot of smelt were flushed

through Oahe Dam during the 2011 flood. Smelt had poor spawning seasons the next two years, and in 2013 the population was estimated at fewer than 1 million. This year's estimate is closer to 20 million.

The low smelt numbers might have contributed to a strong lake herring hatch. Biologists believe smelt tend to eat larval fish such as lake herring.

The baitfish population is still fairly low compared to what it has been in the past, Fincel said. Before the 2011 flooding there were an estimated 100 million smelt and juvenile herring in the lake.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Sandee Teusink of Yankton will celebrate her 70th Birthday on Saturday, November 8, 2014.

Upstairs, Czeckers Sports Bar & Grill
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- '14 Buick LaCrosse #P2386, White, 10k miles, leather only \$25,990
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