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FRIDAY ■ OCTOBER 14, 2011



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VOLUME 137 NUMBER 145

The Dakotas' Oldest Newspaper | TWO SECTIONS | www.yankton.net

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Official Says Bonuses For Flu Workers Were Legal

Audit Scrutinizes Health Dept. Employees' Pay

BY CHET BROKAW
Associated Press Writer

PIERRE — Bonuses given to South Dakota Health Department employees who worked to fight the swine flu threat two years ago were legal and proper, state Health Secretary Doneen Hollingsworth told a legislative committee Thursday.



Hollingsworth

A state audit found that the \$500 bonuses given to 155 Health Department employees were not allowable costs under federal rules because the agency did not have a compensation plan in place that applied bonuses consistently across all programs. Auditors recommended the department follow established policies in the future.

Hollingsworth said the bonuses were allowable under federal guidelines that applied to the \$6.5 million federal grant South Dakota received to vaccinate people, conduct lab tests and take other steps to fight the H1N1 virus in 2009-2010. The U.S. Health and Human Services Department, which provided the grant, has not questioned the bonuses, she said.

"It was an allowable expense," Hollingsworth told the Legislature's Government Operations and Audit Committee.

"They are allowable provided that the payments are reasonable, they are made according to a plan and it's consistently applied. I think we've been able to demonstrate each of those things," Hollingsworth said.

The health secretary said the \$500 bonuses were given to show appreciation to employees who worked a significant amount of time and went beyond their normal duties to deal with the swine flu threat. She noted that the state Bureau of Personnel set details of the plan based on bonuses that have previously been given in other state agencies. About a third of the Health Department's employees got bonuses.

Rep. Paul Dennert, D-Columbia, said he knows bonuses have been paid in other programs, but he and other lawmakers noted that the Health Department bonuses were awarded when state employees' salaries were frozen because of

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HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE



KELLY HERTZ/P&D

Jack Warner, the executive director of the South Dakota Board of Regents, spoke during a town hall meeting Thursday night in Yankton about public secondary education in the state and the challenges facing it.

REGENTS OFFICIAL:

Education Requires Public Investment

BY NATHAN JOHNSON
nathan.johnson@yankton.net

During a town hall meeting Thursday night in Yankton, a South Dakota Board of Regents official addressed the shift of educational costs from the state to the student that has occurred in the last 11 years.

State support of public higher education has dropped from 57 percent to 39 percent during that time, according to Jack Warner, the executive director and chief executive officer of the Board of Regents. Meanwhile, student expenses have risen from 43 percent to 61 percent.

Every year, the Regents staff holds meetings around the state at the invitation of local legislators. The Yankton meeting at the Avera Sacred Heart Professional Office Pavilion was the eighth of 17 planned for the year. District 18 Reps. Bernie Hunhoff and Nick Moser, as well as Sen. Jean Hunhoff, invited the Regents to Yankton for the town hall gathering.

Warner said the shifting costs and what that is doing to the affordability of secondary education has been a topic at many of the meetings so far. Just this year, \$5.4 million in state spending was cut from the secondary education system.

"I worry about smart kids who come from poor families and really struggle," he stated. "They are the ones that are often working too many jobs, having to drop

"If the current trend continues, what you're seeing is the slow privatization of public education."

JACK WARNER

out for a semester, save money and come back. Their success rates concern me."

South Dakota remains the only state in the country without a state-funded, needs-based financial aid program to increase the pursuit of secondary education by low-income residents.

What is occurring in South Dakota is part of a larger trend in the United States of cutting funding for education, Warner said.

"If the current trend continues, what you're seeing is the slow privatization of public education," he added.

That widespread decision is coming at a cost: Warner said that the U.S. now ranks 13th in the world in the percentage of its citizens that hold a post-secondary credential of one kind or another. The U.S. used to be number one.

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 of doing good.

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Pheasant Hunters Get Warm SD Welcome

BY AMBER HUNT
Associated Press

SIoux FALLS — You'd never know that the pheasant count is down in the Dakotas by talking with Sandy Audiss, owner of the Pheasant Bar in Winner, S.D.

In anticipation of the Saturday opening of the hunting season, Audiss spent this week getting her pheasant-themed and hunter-friendly bar ready for the annual onslaught of orange. That meant fixing the burned-out sign in front of the business, ensuring that plenty of beer was on tap and readying the karaoke machine for post-hunt warbling.

"A lot of the hunters are old ones that we've known forever and come every year. They're just like family," said Audiss, who took over the bar five years ago from her father, who had owned it for about 30 years. "A lot bring their grandkids now. The older ones move on, and the new ones come in. It's really a family thing. And it's a good economic thing."

Towns such as Winner and nearby Gregory thrive during the nearly three-month hunting season, which ends Jan. 1 in South Dakota. Hunters arriving Thursday at the Sioux Falls Regional Airport were greeted by more than a dozen businesses serving as a tarmac-side welcome wagon.

HUNTING | PAGE 16A

Ground-Breaking Held For New Casino

BY LISA HARE
lisa.hare@yankton.net

SANTEe, Neb. — On Thursday, atop a windswept hill on the south side of Nebraska scenic highway 12 — approximately 2 miles east of the existing Ohiya Casino — a ground-breaking ceremony was held for the Santee Sioux Nation's new Ohiya Casino and Lodge.

"Today is a beautiful day," said Roger Trudell, chairman of the tribe.

He wasn't just commenting on the weather.

Trudell added that council and community members alike had held a vision for this day for many years.

"The benefits Knox County will get from this will be like none that they've had

for a very long time," he said.

With the help of a hefty \$20 million loan from the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community (SMSC) of Minnesota, Santee is planning a 25,000-square-foot casino; 47-room lodge with two luxury suites, a banquet facility and conference center; a convenience store and gas station (to replace the existing Feather Hill gas station); and an 18-hole golf course and club house.

Baxter Construction Co. of Fort Madison, Iowa, will be handling the construction.

"We should have workers in here in the next 30 days," said Steve Leavitt, senior

CASINO | PAGE 2A



LISA HARE / P&D

Tribal chairmen Stan Crooks of the Shokapee Sioux from Minnesota (middle left) and Roger Trudell from Santee Sioux Nation (middle right) took center stage in Thursday's 12-person lineup in the ground-breaking ceremony for the new Ohiya Casino and Lodge. Construction for the \$20 million project is scheduled to commence within the next month.

Cottonwood Campground To Close For Renovations

BY DEREK BARTOS
derek.bartos@yankton.net

For the second straight year, Cottonwood Campground below Gavins Point Dam will be closed for free camping during the winter season to allow for renovations.

The campground, which is operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, will close for the season at 4 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 16. Following the closure, construction will begin on the entrance area.

"We're widening the entrance road, and we're also going to be relocating the booth to the center of the road for better access for ingress and egress for the public," said Gary Ledbetter, Natural Resource Manager. "It's a more standard way for entrance stations, and we believe this will provide a better service to the public."

Ledbetter added that the main

reason for the renovations is safety.

"With the booth in the middle like that, you'll have traffic going in and traffic going out on either side of the booth," he said. "That will make it a safer access point to the campground for campers."

Typically, Cottonwood's 75 campsites are open for free camping during the winter and early spring. However, due to the construction, the campground will be closed for free camping until the project's completion, which is expected by next May.

"The contractor wanted to get started this fall and get some of the preliminary work done," Ledbetter said. "Hopefully it will be finished next spring."

Cottonwood was also closed for free camping last winter as an

CAMP | PAGE 2A

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TOMORROW: Bereavement Workshop Planned For Yankton

