

S.D. Row Crop Harvest Beating 5-Year Average

SIoux FALLS (AP) — The harvest of row crops in South Dakota is well under way, with progress for most outpacing the 5-year average. The Agriculture Department says in its latest crop and weather report that 80 percent of the soybean crop has been harvested, ahead of last year at 82 percent and ahead of the 5-year average of 64 percent. Thirty-eight percent of corn has been harvested, ahead of the 5-year average of 22 percent. And 35 percent of sunflowers are harvested, ahead of the 5-year average of 17 percent. Sorghum harvest is 63 percent complete, ahead of the 5-year average of 47 percent. The week brought 5.9 days suitable for field work, and scattered rain brought much needed moisture for winter wheat emergence.

Neb. Makes Progress On Soybean Harvest

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska farmers continue to make good progress on the soybean harvest, while the corn harvest is running about average. The U.S. Department of Agriculture says in the weekly crop report on Monday that the soybean harvest is 84 percent complete. That's close to last year's 86 percent but well ahead of the average of 67 percent. The USDA says the corn harvest was at 30 percent. That's behind last year's 47 percent but near the average of 28 percent. Seventy-five percent of the corn is in good to excellent condition. The report says seeding of the winter wheat crop is almost done. Cattle are being moved to stalks as fields become available.

No Fireworks For Mount Rushmore On July 4

MOUNT RUSHMORE NATIONAL MEMORIAL (AP) — Officials at Mount Rushmore National Memorial say the July 4 celebration at the monument in 2012 once again will not include fireworks. Superintendent Cheryl Schreier says that wildfire risks from the pine beetle infestation and the success of the non-explosive 2010 and 2011 celebrations led to the decision. More than 21,000 people visited the Memorial on July 3 in 2011, exceeding the 2009 and 2010 numbers. Efforts to combat the pine beetle infestation in the Black Hills and reduce fire danger are ongoing. But officials say the condition of the forest in the surrounding area continues to deteriorate and will remain a concern for the foreseeable future. National Park Service Regional Director Michael Reynolds says providing a celebration without fireworks is the prudent course of action.

Rural States To Lobby For Medicare Provision

SIoux FALLS (AP) — Health leaders from the Dakotas, Montana and Wyoming plan to travel to the nation's capital this week to try to salvage future Medicare payments. The group wants Congress to protect new rules that, beginning in 2013, will correct inequities in Medicare payments to some rural states. The "frontier" provision of health care reform promises higher payments to hospitals and doctors for treating Medicare patients in rural states, but President Barack Obama has recommended eliminating it as part of federal budget cuts. Fifteen executives from the Dakotas, Montana and Wyoming will go to the Capitol on Wednesday to make their case. "We have to decide which things are important and which are not. This policy is really about fairness," Sanford Health vice president Cindy Morrison told the *Argus Leader*.

Iowa GOP Sets Presidential Caucuses Jan 3.

WASHINGTON (AP) — Iowa Republicans are holding their state's presidential nominating caucuses on Jan. 3, even though New Hampshire is threatening to move its traditional first-in-the-nation primary into December. Iowa Republican Party Chairman Matt Strawn says voters and candidates need the certainty of a firm date. Florida's decision last month to move its primary to Jan. 31 set off a chain reaction by early-voting states to preserve their leadoff status. New Hampshire's chief election official says Nevada's decision this month to hold caucuses Jan. 14 would crowd the primary, and has threatened to hold his before the holidays. Strawn admits the Iowa GOP board's vote Monday puts his state at risk of falling behind New Hampshire. But he points to 2008 when Iowa went Jan. 3, followed by New Hampshire Jan. 8.

Proposal To Axe N.D. Property Taxes Stirs Debate

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A proposed constitutional amendment that would make North Dakota the only state in the nation to abolish property taxes would be "the most profound policy change since statehood," a county commissioner said Monday. The measure, which goes to a statewide vote in June 2012, is stirring controversy in North Dakota, where oil and gas development have contributed to an expanding economy and low unemployment that has largely insulated the state from the nation's economic malaise. That prosperity has spurred arguments that North Dakota can afford to abolish local property taxes, and that its economy would become more attractive to business expansion if it did so. Critics say the change would force the Legislature to drum up \$740 million elsewhere for North Dakota's school districts, counties and cities. Scott Wagner, a Cass County commissioner, said the amendment would result in a Capitol donnybrook over budget priorities, with local elected officials having no vote on how the fights were resolved. "This is potentially the most profound policy change since statehood," Wagner said. A citizens' group critical of rising government outlays got the proposed amendment on the ballot. State general fund spending has doubled from \$2 billion to \$4 billion since 2005. If the amendment were to be approved, the Legislature would have to draft a plan to provide replacement money for local governments. North Dakota's school districts, counties and cities rely on those property taxes to finance their services.

S.F. Fires Sparking Suspicion

BY AMBER HUNT
 Associated Press

SIoux FALLS — Sioux Falls Fire Marshal Dean Lanier is beyond fed up with the apparently record-setting string of suspicious fires his department has had to battle over the past six weeks. "I was sick of it after the first fire," Lanier told The Associated Press on Monday. Since early September, firefighters have responded to 15 fires in garages, sheds and vehicles mostly set at night in a 10-block span in central Sioux Falls. Investigators say it's the only such spate of fires that anyone can remember. Though Sioux Falls is the biggest city in both South Dakota and neighboring North Dakota, it doesn't have big-city crime: In all of 2010, the city of 160,000 residents reported just 25 arsons to the FBI, according to the federal agency's annual crime report. In 2009, there were 24 arsons. In a 2010 ranking by the Farmers

Insurance Group of the country's safest mid-size cities, Sioux Falls came in second behind Olympia, Wash.

Over the weekend, two more vehicles were set ablaze. Lanier said the methods and targets have been consistent. The blazes begin in empty vehicles or garages that have been left unlocked. So far, the fires haven't spread to homes despite South Dakota's notorious wind. No one has been hurt. Judith Underberg, who lives on South Dakota Avenue, said the fire started inside her garage Sept. 5 could easily have spread. Luckily, a neighbor spotted it about 11 p.m., called police and alerted Judith and her husband, Richard, who were asleep. The couple has lived in the neighborhood for nearly 20 years. "Though they feel violated — 'it just intrudes your life,'" she said of the crime — the Underbergs also feel lucky. "It could have been so much worse," Judith Underberg said. The Underbergs had left their garage unlocked. The fire was set in a 1998 Ford Ranger

parked inside. The heat bubbled the top of the couple's mini caravan as well, and the inside of the garage was ruined by smoke damage, Judith Underberg said.

Both vehicles' gas tanks were nearly full, she said, adding to the "what-ifs." She said that she and her husband now lock everything. That's the main advice offered by Sam Clemens, public information officer for the Sioux Falls Police Department. "The one thing that seems to be similar in the cases is that there's something that's been left unlocked," he said. "There's no forced entry. The easiest thing people can do is lock up their property." Lanier said firefighters will be on heightened alert until someone is caught. Officials ask that residents call the police or Crime Stoppers with any tips.

Tips to Crime Stoppers can be called in to (605) 367-7007 or left at www.crimestopperssiouxempire.com.

Native American Leader Dies In Montana

BY MATT VOLZ
 Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. — Elouise Cobell took personally the death of each American Indian who never saw a dime in the U.S. government's \$3.4 billion settlement in a long battle over mismanaged land royalties, viewing each passing as another person who would never know justice. Now she is among those who won't witness the final outcome after dedicating more than 15 years of her life to seeing through the largest government class-action settlement in U.S. history. Cobell died Sunday at a Great Falls hospital of complications from cancer at age 65. The Blackfeet woman from Browning, Mont., was the driving force that guided the lawsuit through seemingly endless court proceedings and political bickering on Capitol Hill. Even though she was successful at overcoming those obstacles — a judge approved the \$3.4 billion settlement earlier this year — the deal faces still another legal hurdle. Several potential members of the class-action lawsuit have filed appeals in U.S. District Court in the District of Columbia, promising to stretch the case into at least next year.



LOUIS SAHAGUN/LOS ANGELES TIMES/MCT
Elouise Cobell, the treasurer of the Blackfeet tribe who tenaciously pursued a lawsuit that accused the federal government of cheating Native Americans out of more than a century's worth of royalties, resulting in a record \$3.4-billion settlement, has died. She was 65.

Each has different a reason for challenging the deal, including allegations that the lead plaintiffs abandoned the true aim of the lawsuit — to finally have the government account for how much money was actually lost — in exchange for a cash settlement from which they would benefit the most. Dennis Gingold, the attorney Cobell has

worked with since the lawsuit was filed in 1996, said individual Indians have lost their greatest champion. But he hopes her death will unite people and get the settlement money to the estimated 500,000 beneficiaries before too many more die. "Over the years, many elders and many sick class members have died. Elouise had been very concerned about that. That is why she agreed to the settlement," Gingold said. "Unfortunately, the settlement is two years old, and class members continue to die. When we told the court that time is of the essence, it was not hyperbole." Thousands of potential beneficiaries across the nation died during the 14-year legal battle and subsequent negotiations in Congress that took an additional year. To Cobell, each death stung. "We've lost three people in the last week here in the Blackfeet (Reservation in northwestern Montana) who were beneficiaries to this settlement, and it hurts," Cobell told The Associated Press back in November after the Senate temporarily blocked the deal. Former Senate Indian Affairs Chairman Byron Dorgan of North Dakota said there would be no settlement without Cobell and her sheer force of will.

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