

Statehouse Roundup

SD Indee Voters Hit Six Figures

BY BOB MERCER
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — South Dakota passed an electoral milestone this month, as independents topped 100,000 for the first time.

The statewide monthly totals on Oct. 1 were 100,670 independents; 244,793 Republicans; 188,618 Democrats; 384 Constitutionalists; 1,275 Libertarians; and six Americans Elect.

Nearly all of the growth in South Dakota's voter registration came in the independent column during recent years.

Looking back at the 2006 general election, registration numbers were 74,608 independents; 240,101 Republicans; 190,905 Democrats; 350 Constitutionalists; and 1,168 Libertarians.

People can register in many ways in South Dakota.

They can use a mail-in form available from the South Dakota Secretary of State's Internet site (www.sdsos.gov) or from their county auditors.

They also can register in person at county auditor offices, city finance offices, driver license exam stations, pub-

lic assistance offices where food stamps, TANF and WIC aid is handled, human services offices that provide assistance to people with disabilities, and armed forces recruiting offices.

Voter registration drives often are held too, including at college, university and technical institute campuses.

• **MILK WRESTLING:** The state Department of Agriculture will try again Wednesday with a public hearing on its proposed labeling rules for raw milk sold in South Dakota.

The hearing is at 10 a.m. Central in room 412 of the state Capitol in Pierre.

The Legislature's rules review committee previously directed department officials to revert to an earlier step in the rule-making process for several reasons.

The financial analysis wasn't adequately performed and the department's consolidation of existing rules and proposed rules were difficult to sift.

A question remains among some of the six legislators on the panel will determine the department has legal authority under state law.

The rules proposed for the hearing Wednesday are the same as those con-

sidered by the committee last time when they were sent back.

• **FOREIGN AID:** There are sports agents. There are travel agents. Then there are agents for international students. They will be one of the topics Wednesday afternoon when the state Board of Regents meets at Black Hills State University in Spearfish.

The regents will look at guidelines for the state universities to use in dealing with the agents for international students. The agents' fees are sometimes paid by students, sometimes by the institutions and sometimes both, according to a briefing document provided to the regents.

Also proposed is that each university shall file a report that will be delivered to the regents annually.

The report would include number of agents employed, cost of each agent, number of students recruited by each agent and the academic record of each group of students recruited.

An audit at Dickinson State University last year found that hundreds of international students received credits and degrees without attending courses at the North Dakota school.

Shutdown Causes Market Info Vacuum

BY ROXANA HEGEMAN
Associated Press

WICHITA, Kan. — When Tim Peterson finished planting his 900 acres of winter wheat last week, the usually market-savvy Kansas farmer unexpectedly found himself struggling to make critical marketing decisions without being able to access to vital agricultural reports, casualties of the federal government shutdown.

"We have no clue what is going on in the market," said Peterson, who farms near Monument in northwest Kansas. He typically protects his investment in seed and fertilizer by "locking in" the price his wheat crop will fetch next July with a futures contract, which shields farmers from market fluctuations by guaranteeing a price while the crop is in the ground.

Farmers and livestock producers use the reports put out

by the National Agriculture Statistics Services to make decisions — such as how to price crops, which commodities to grow and when to sell them — as well as track cattle auction prices. Not only has the NASS stopped putting out new reports about demand and supply, exports and prices, but all websites with past information have been taken down.

"It is causing a direct void in information that is immediate," Peterson said.

This worries him far more than his other problem: When will his \$20,000 subsidy check from the government, which usually comes in October, arrive?

Since the U.S. Agriculture Department's local farm services offices also have been shuttered, farmers can't apply for new loans, sign up acreages for government programs or receive government checks for programs they're

already enrolled in. And at a time when researchers who are seeking new wheat varieties and plant traits should be planting experimental plots, all work has ground to a halt.

Kansas Farmer's Union president Donn Teske, a grower in the northeast Kansas town of Wheaton, worried about payments he's owed for idling some environmentally sensitive land under the Conservation Reserve Program.

"I always look forward to that check coming in the mail," the 58-year-old said.

But all of that, farmers say, pales in comparison to the lack of agriculture reports, because farmers today depend far more on global marketplaces than government payouts like in the past.

The reports, for instance, can alert them to shortfalls in overseas markets or if there's a wide swing in acres planted,

both of which would prompt U.S. growers to plant extra crops to meet those demands or hang on to a harvest longer to get a better price.

"That information is worth a lot of money, a lot more than \$20,000 a year," Peterson said, a reference to his subsidy.

Major commodity players can pay for crop size estimates usually provided in the NASS reports from "private sources," said Dalton Henry, director of governmental affairs for the industry group Kansas Wheat. "Producers aren't going to have that same luxury," he said.

During the shutdown, the USDA won't provide sales reports from Oklahoma livestock auctions that are used to help set prices on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, state Department of Agriculture employee Jack Carson said.

"We are working. They are not," Carson said.

Cancer In Remission For Neb. Boy

BY NELSON LAMPE
Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — The young boy with cancer whose touchdown run at the Nebraska spring football game was viewed by millions on the Internet is in remission, his father said Monday.

Jack Hoffman, now 8, captured the hearts of Nebraska football fans when, with the players' help, he ran 69 yards to score during April's intrasquad game. His scamper was viewed nearly 8.4 million times on YouTube and re-played on national television. The video also won an ESPY award as the "Best Moment."

Jack's father, Andy Hoffman, said the good news about the brain tumor came after an MRI test.

"Doctors came in and said this tumor is rock-solid stable," Hoffman said, noting doctors compared Wednesday's MRI to a baseline MRI done in June and saw the malignancy

had stopped growing.

The encouraging news was tempered by warnings from the doctors: More than half of all kids in Jack's situation have relapses.

"We pray like crazy and hope Jack isn't in that segment," Hoffman said. But it's a long journey, he continued, "and the doctors have done a good job of preparing us."

Jack's tumor grew back after two surgeries in 2011, and it occupies a spot near his brain stem. The location is

considered inoperable now, Hoffman said, but that could change.

The boy's future is filled with MRI scans: one every three months for the next year, every six months for the year following, and then once a year.

Jack is a second-grader at a school near the family's home in Atkinson, a city of about 1,240 people in north-central Nebraska.

The rest of his family will continue to raise money for

cancer research through the Team Jack Foundation.

"We're not living life in fear," Hoffman said. "We're busy living."

Gov. Issues Emergency Declaration

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman has issued an emergency declaration for parts of the state affected by tornadoes and other severe weather.

Heineman announced the declaration Monday, and called the damage "extensive." He toured tornado damage in Wayne over the weekend.

Multiple tornadoes hit northeast Nebraska over the weekend. Several inches of snow also hit the Nebraska Panhandle. Lt. Gov. Lavon Heidemann and emergency officials will tour some of the damage in the northwest part of the state on Tuesday.

Officials also say local ranchers have reported heavy cattle loss due to freezing conditions, but additional information was not available.

Neb. Authorities: Man Stole Gifts

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A man who volunteered at a fundraiser for a Nebraska homicide victim has been accused of stealing gifts from the event.

The Douglas County Sheriff's office says 50-year-old Jeffrey A. Johnson was booked Monday on suspicion of felony theft in connection with a Sept. 27 fundraiser for the family of Andrea Kruger. She is one of four victims tied to the Omaha killings this summer.

Authorities say a plasma television and a framed picture of the University of Nebraska Memorial Stadium were stolen and later sold at a pawn shop.

Johnson, who volunteered at the fundraiser, also faces unrelated charges of domestic assault and obstructing a peace officer. Records do not list an attorney.

An arrest warrant has been issued for 26-year-old Kristin V. Hunt in connection to the theft.

Planes Search For Lost Hunters

RAPID CITY (AP) — Pilots with the South Dakota Wing of the Civil Air Patrol are searching for hunters who might be lost in the Black Hills after the weekend snowstorm.

The Department of Game, Fish and Parks says it had two calls earlier but they turned out to be people operating snow machines — not stranded hunters.

It says no hunters have been found.

The GFP says the Civil Air Patrol is still flying over the area because cellphone coverage isn't good in some areas, so any hunters who are stuck couldn't call for help.

Patrol planes are flying north of Highway 36 and 16A from Highway 79 to the Wyoming border. That's the main elk hunting area and the part of the hills that got the most snow.

Neb. Health Care Enrollment Proceeds

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nonprofit groups are still working to sign Nebraskans up for health insurance through the new federal marketplace, despite computer problems that have lasted for nearly a week.

The group Community of Nebraska reported Monday that some residents were able to create accounts within the new federal website, healthcare.gov. But they were still unable to access details about the plans offered in Nebraska.

Nebraska officials have opted for a federally facilitated exchange set up within the state. Some residents are enrolling with help from health insurance navigators, who were trained to walk people through the process.

Roger Furrer, executive director of Community Action of Nebraska, says most of the residents calling about enrollment have come from Douglas, Lancaster and Scotts Bluff counties.

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