

Body Of 16-Year-Old Boy Found On I-90

SIOUX FALLS — Authorities are investigating the discovery of a body of a 16-year-old boy from Minnehaha County found on Interstate 90 just east of the I-29 interchange.

The sheriff's office says Jay Gary Lavender was found about 10:45 p.m. Thursday, and it appears the boy had been struck by a semitrailer that left the scene.

Authorities are seeking the public's help in locating the truck, which they believe to be a white semi with a large grill that was traveling west. Witnesses told deputies that the truck was seen parked on the side of the road about a quarter mile west of the scene.

The incident prompted a brief shutdown of the highway.

Package Raises Alarm At Nuclear Plant

BLAIR, Neb. — A bomb squad has determined that a package found in a vehicle at the Fort Calhoun nuclear power plant poses no danger.

The Omaha Public Power District says in a release that security workers noticed the package around 8:44 a.m. Friday. The vehicle was just outside what the district called the protected area of the plant. About 30 workers at a nearby warehouse were evacuated as a precaution, but the plant continued to operate.

The district says the Washington County Sheriff's Office was notified, and a bomb squad from Omaha eventually was called in. The squad determined that the package didn't contain any explosives. It's not clear yet what the package did contain, if anything.

Harrisburg Residents Unite In Prayer

HARRISBURG — Members of the Harrisburg community came together in prayer as they deal with emotions stemming from a school shooting.

Several Harrisburg faith leaders set up a Thursday night prayer service at Harrisburg High School to give residents an opportunity to heal together. People prayed, lit candles and wrote messages on large rolls of paper draped over folded tables.

Pastor Jess Daum tells the *Argus Leader* newspaper that Harrisburg residents need to find peace and comfort in one another. He says, "When one little part of our community hurts, we all feel it."

Sixteen-year-old Mason Buhl has pleaded not guilty in adult court to attempted murder in the Thursday shooting of high school Principal Kevin Lein. Lein suffered a minor arm injury and has returned to work. No students were hurt.

USDA Awards \$35 Million In Food Grants

DES MOINES, Iowa — The U.S. Department of Agriculture is providing \$35 million in federal grants to support farmers markets and other local farm programs.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced Friday the distribution of funds allocated in last year's farm bill to hundreds of local food marketing programs.

Iowa farmers market promotion grants include \$97,000 for Fort Dodge, \$61,000 for Belmont and \$35,000 for Creston.

The North Iowa Fresh food hub in Belmond gets nearly \$100,000 to expand. The Nebraska Food Cooperative in Belgrade receives nearly \$100,000 to develop and promote a local food supply network.

The USDA says purchases of locally-produced food have reached nearly \$12 billion as farmers increase direct sales to local grocers, institutions and restaurants.

The number of farmers markets has surged to more than 8,500 from 5,200 in 2009.

Man Injured In Fire Dies In Hospital

RAPID CITY — A Rapid City man has died after suffering burns and smoke inhalation in a house fire.

Authorities say the 79-year-old man was pronounced dead at a hospital following the Thursday night blaze. They did not immediately identify him.

The cause of the fire was not immediately determined. Authorities say the home has significant smoke damage.

City Terminates Nursing Home Contract

BAYARD, Neb. — The Bayard City Council has voted to terminate the management contract for its nursing home.

Scottsbluff television station *KDUH* reports that the council held a special meeting Wednesday and voted 4-3 to end the contract two months before it was due to expire and take over administration of Chimney Rock Villa on Friday. The city owns the 49-bed skilled nursing facility but had contracted with Rural Health Development to run it.

Bayard residents have raised concerns about patient care and facility staffing, which has fallen to a critical level.

Mayor Michelle Coolidge says more staffers will be sought and says a council committee has options for the facility's future administration.

Group Wants Vote On \$8M Public Library

ABERDEEN — An Aberdeen man is leading a petition drive to try to force a public vote on a proposed \$8 million public library.

Duane Riedel questions the cost of the facility. He and others need to gather 867 signatures by the close of business Oct. 21 to put the matter on the ballot, either in a special election or in the June 2016 election.

The *American News* reports that the City Council this week gave final approval to the financing plan for the project. It includes \$5.9 million in city funds and \$2.1 million from the Alexander Mitchell Public Library Foundation.

Lack Of Activity Causes Airport Closure

TRENTON, Neb. — So few pilots have been using the Trenton Municipal Airport in southwest Nebraska that it's been closed down.

The *McCook Daily Gazette* reports that the Village Board voted last month to take the airport out of service. The airport has been costing the village about \$2,000 a year — a sizable chunk of the village's \$60,000 property tax revenue.

Board chairman John Rundel says it's been several years since regular crop-dusters used the airport and more than 10 years since an airplane was based in a hangar there.

The Hitchcock County community has about 560 residents.

Man Charged With Assault In Boy's Death

MADISON — Authorities have charged a Madison man in connection with the death of a 3-year-old boy.

Police say 21-year-old Jacob Meinders faces two counts of aggravated assault on a child, along with alternate child abuse counts. He could face up to 30 years in prison if convicted.

It wasn't immediately clear if Meinders has an attorney, and a telephone listing for him could not be found.

The *Daily Leader* reports that police on Sept. 29 responded to a report of an unresponsive child at a Madison residence. The boy was reported to have fallen down a flight of stairs. He was taken to a Sioux Falls hospital, where he later died.

Police Chief Justin Meyer says the investigation is ongoing and authorities expect to file additional charges.

Inmate Also Faces Child Abuse Charges

COUNCIL BLUFFS, Iowa — A man already serving time in Nebraska for child sexual assault faces similar charges in western Iowa.

The *Daily Nonpareil* reports that Rocky Ontiveros is charged with two counts of sexual abuse of a minor in Potawattamie County. Online court records don't list the name of an attorney who could be contacted to comment on his behalf.

Iowa court documents say Ontiveros sexually abused two children from Nov. 1, 2013, to Sept. 19, 2014. His preliminary hearing in a Council Bluffs courtroom is scheduled for next week.

In August the 28-year-old Ontiveros was sentenced to 30 to 40 years in a Nebraska prison and must register as a sex offender. He'd pleaded guilty to sexual assault of a minor in Douglas County.

Platte Deaths

BY BOB MERCER
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — Members of the Legislature's watchdog panel received a letter Friday from Gov. Dennis Daugaard regarding financial questions and the recent killings of a family of six at Platte that have rocked a program to help American Indian high school students.

Daugaard outlined to the legislators the actions and investigations into a corruption scandal that had quietly built in plain sight over the past decade.

Involved are various current and former officials at the state Education Department in Pierre and at Mid Central Education Cooperative at Platte.

Also under scrutiny are several non-profit organizations, consultants and the South Dakota GEAR UP program's director at Rapid City.

The matter turned gruesome in less than 24 hours on Sept. 16-17.

State Education Secretary Melody Schopp notified Mid Central executive director Dan Guerick by telephone on Sept. 16 she wouldn't continue routing the federal GEAR UP funding through Mid Central.

Before the sun rose Sept. 17, Scott Westerhuis, the business manager at Mid Central Education through whom millions of dollars flowed from the federal government through the state department for GEAR UP, allegedly murdered his wife and their four children with a shotgun.

Westerhuis allegedly then lit the family's house afire and committed suicide with the gun, according to a preliminary report from state Attorney General Marty Jackley.

The letter from Daugaard, dated Oct. 1, marks the governor's first public statements about the matter.

He sent the letter to Rep. Dan Dryden, R-Rapid City, who is chairman of the Legislature's Government Operations and Audit Committee.

The letter was forwarded to the other committee members Friday by the state Department of Legislative Audit.

Daugaard revealed in the letter that Stacy Phelps of Rapid City has resigned from the state Board of Education.

Phelps in 1992 founded the GEAR UP program that helps American Indian high school students consider going to college.

Phelps had continued to run GEAR UP since.



Schopp

His two roles weren't secret.

In 2008 Gov. Mike Rounds appointed Phelps to the state board. Rounds noted Phelps' GEAR UP role.

Daugaard reappointed Phelps to the state board in 2013.

Business reports on public file with the South Dakota Secretary of State office show Phelps, Scott Westerhuis and Nicole Westerhuis were involved together in several non-profit and business ventures.

Daugaard also had a direct opportunity to know about the state Education Department's activities.

Tony Venhuizen, who is the governor's chief of staff and is married to one of the governor's daughters, oversaw the department and Education Secretary Melody Schopp as part of his work portfolio.

Schopp delegated much of the department's Indian education activities and their funding to Mid Central.

In 2012 Schopp appointed an oversight board for Indian education.

Among the members were Rick Melmer, a former state education secretary under Rounds.

Another was Keith Moore, the department's first Indian education director, who was appointed under Rounds.

Schopp worked with both of them at the department.

Daugaard said in his Oct. 1 letter that he appreciated the work Phelps has done with Native American students.

Daugaard then wrote that although the state board "has no role in awarding or oversight of SD DOE contracts or grants, Mr. Phelps' continued position on that board would be a distraction from the important work the board performs, given his involvement with GEAR UP."

The scandal is focused in large part on the handling of GEAR UP funds.

The state Department of Legislative Audit reviewed financial records of the state Education Department and Mid Central for fiscal 2014 involving GEAR UP and found various problems.

The state audit at that time didn't reach down into non-profit organizations and consultants who received payments from GEAR UP funds, including Phelps' GEAR UP office in Rapid City.

York Man Accused Of Child Abuse

YORK, Neb. (AP) — A January trial has been scheduled for a York man accused of child abuse in the spanking of a 4-year-old girl.

The *York News-Times* reports that 23-year-old Luis Rodriguez-Olvera pleaded not guilty this week in York County District Court. His trial is set to begin on Jan. 20.

Court documents say a child care worker found bruises on the girl's buttocks, back, a side and an arm. Investigators say the child's mother said she was at work when her fiancé spanked the girl. Investigators also say Rodriguez-Olvera acknowledged striking the girl six or seven times with a sandal because she was "acting up or misbehaving."

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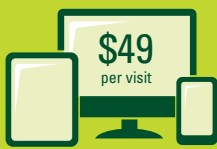


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