

Nebraska Lawmakers Could Face ‘Extremely Lean’ 2016 Session

BY GRANT SCHULTE
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Nebraska state government could face a financial squeeze in next year’s legislative session, forcing lawmakers and Gov. Pete Ricketts to trim from the budget or find money elsewhere.

New revenue estimates approved Friday by the Nebraska Economic Forecasting Advisory Board will create a projected \$132 million shortfall in the two-year, \$8.7 billion budget that was approved earlier this year.

The estimates could complicate efforts to pass major tax cuts or new spending priorities during the session that begins on Jan. 6.

“More than anything else, it’s going to lead to an extremely lean legislative session,” said Sen. Heath Mello, chairman of the budget-writing Appropriations Committee. “I think it shows that right now, engaging in any risky tax reform could only be more detrimental to the state moving forward.”

Ricketts vowed to continue working with senators, tax experts and other stakeholders to prepare tax proposals, while taking steps to control state agency spending. Ricketts has said he plans to unveil a package that will lower income and property taxes. “As I have traveled the state, Nebraskans have told me that their family and small business budgets benefit from tax relief,” Ricketts said.

The state forecasting board reduced its revenue forecast by \$154 million over the two-year budget cycle, which would place the state’s general fund below the minimum reserve required by law.

Because of accounting adjustments and money that’s already in the general fund, the projected shortfall that lawmakers could face is closer to \$132 million. Revenue is now projected to grow 3.6 percent in the current fiscal year, and 4.1 percent in the next fiscal year. State revenue has traditionally grown by about 5 percent annually.

Forecasting board members continued to express optimism about Nebraska’s economy, but pointed to worries about the global economy and companies cutting jobs.

“As optimistic as I am about the economy, I’m more cautious than I was in our last meeting” in April, said member Steven Ferris, a financial adviser from Lincoln.

Jerome Deichert of Omaha, the board’s chairman, said the entire state continues to face a shortage of housing and employees who can fill high-skill jobs. The new forecast illustrates the importance of caution when it comes to state spending and tax policies, said Renee Fry, executive director of the OpenSky Policy Institute. Fry said state revenues can be unpredictable even when the economy is strong and unemployment is low.

“Fortunately in Nebraska, our lawmakers have maintained a strong cash reserve that will help us maintain our schools, roads and other vital services when the economy dips,” Fry said in a statement.

“They’re making a difference in the community by letting people know we’re outreaching for a need—not just for our benefit, but for those who need food and help around the holiday season,” Skuza said. “We hope that people understand that, even though we are a college, we like to be part of the community. As a whole, we’re always looking out for each other and making sure those partnerships are created.”

Follow @ReillyBiel on Twitter.

proximately eight groups are put together to go to one or two neighborhoods and hit as many homes as possible before the deadline.

“People in the community weren’t really aware of it the first year we did it, so we started advertising it and that’s made a big difference,” Skuza said. “Now we have some people prepared with donations when the students show up.”

The experience is a win-win for students, who not only get service hours in and occasionally some candy on their excursion, but also help a worthy cause.

mentation of legislation. The wind energy ordinance could be suspended if referred to the ballot during that 20-day period, Warne said. Opponents can begin circulating petitions immediately upon final passage of the measure.

Petitions would need to contain a number of valid signatures amounting to at least 5 percent of the active registered voters in the county during the last preceding general election.

Bon Homme County had 3,878 active registered voters in the 2014 general election. Based on that figure, petition circulators would need to collect at least 194 valid signatures.

Given the current timetable, the wind energy ordinance would go into effect in December, Brunken said. However, she knows a referral process would be undertaken with Article 17’s passage, likely delaying its implementation.

“We have residents who said they already want to start circulating petitions,” the auditor said.

The Bon Homme County commissioners alluded to the controversy during their last meeting.

“I hate to see neighbors against neighbors,” Jelsma said.

However, Bon Homme County needs to address the

that range is when people are starting to settle down, they are moving back home. They recognize the quality of life is the best part about it. That is what we have. What we need to do is not only create it so that when you are welcomed and engaged to a community, there is a lot less chance they are going to move on. That is the type of stuff that is going to help us grow.”

While the population of Vermillion is stable, Welch said he would like to see it grow in that critical age group. “I see this as an opportunity to go back to the 30-35 year olds who want to move back and tell them our story,” he said. “We have the feeder system here; we want to figure out how do we keep them in the community. We have refocused on trying to find jobs for the students that the university has trained them for. Now is an opportunity to go try to find those jobs so they stay right here.

“The VCDC in general is doing very well, we have had challenges but have also had great investments and successes coming into the community. I am very excited about the future of Vermillion and am glad to be a part of it.”

bers continued to express optimism about Nebraska’s economy, but pointed to worries about the global economy and companies cutting jobs.

“As optimistic as I am about the economy, I’m more cautious than I was in our last meeting” in April, said member Steven Ferris, a financial adviser from Lincoln.

Jerome Deichert of Omaha, the board’s chairman, said the entire state continues to face a shortage of housing and employees who can fill high-skill jobs.

The new forecast illustrates the importance of caution when it comes to state spending and tax policies, said Renee Fry, executive director of the OpenSky Policy Institute. Fry said state revenues can be unpredictable even when the economy is strong and unemployment is low.

“Fortunately in Nebraska, our lawmakers have maintained a strong cash reserve that will help us maintain our schools, roads and other vital services when the economy dips,” Fry said in a statement.

“They’re making a difference in the community by letting people know we’re outreaching for a need—not just for our benefit, but for those who need food and help around the holiday season,” Skuza said. “We hope that people understand that, even though we are a college, we like to be part of the community. As a whole, we’re always looking out for each other and making sure those partnerships are created.”

Follow @ReillyBiel on Twitter.

issue in some way, he said. “Right now, anyone can build a wind tower (in the county) with a conditional use permit,” he said. “Article 17 gives us more of a say.”

Bon Homme County can’t stop wind tower construction within its borders, Jelsma said.

“Whether we adopt Article 17 to our zoning (ordinance) makes no difference,” he said. “If we don’t have it, they can still build it.”

Hauck saw the issue as one of economic development. “I’ve sat on this (county commission) for seven years, waiting for growth to come to Bon Homme County, and I haven’t seen it,” he said.

Hauck alluded to the stalled progress on a proposed grain-handling facility involving Dakota Plains. The company was looking at a Tabor site but has resumed talks with Yankton County on a location for the proposed project.

“When we were talking with Dakota Plains, it was amazing how much negativity came out of the woodwork,” Hauck said. “I hate what I see happening with (this division) between people (over wind farms). But unless some big manufacturing plant moves here, we can’t keep turning everyone down.”

Follow @RDockendorf on Twitter.

Task Force Determines \$75 Million Needed To Boost Schools

PIERRE (AP) — A state task force on school funding has determined it will take at least \$75 million and a new K-12 funding formula to make South Dakota teacher salaries competitive.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard and Republican lawmakers created the task force earlier this year. It strives for high student achievement, excellent teachers and a funding system to support them both.

Group members didn’t determine where the money will come from at its final meeting Thursday, the *Argus Leader* reports.

Members did agree on the need for a new school funding formula — one based on various targets for teacher salaries, student-teacher ratios and non-instructional costs rather than the current per-student model.

No agreement was reached on firm num-

bers for each target, and members instead opted for some loose guidelines such as a \$48,000 average for teacher salaries. South Dakota teachers currently make an average of about \$40,000 a year. The task force couldn’t agree to a student-teacher ratio.

Task force members reached the \$75 million target by multiplying the number of teachers in the state by the \$8,000 gap in the current average salary and the loose guideline set by the group.

Details of the funding formula will be left to the governor or the 2016 Legislature.

A final report is expected in a couple of weeks.

“This has been tough work, important work,” said Sen. Deb Soholt, R-Sioux Falls. “We have a lot of work to do to move it forward now.”

Farm

From Page 1A

acquired a collection of four walking plows and four John Deere plows. He also has six cultivators, each a different brand. Sorensen didn’t pay much attention to the history of his equipment until his wife, Loretta, started writing about them. Some of the history behind his cultivator collection was recently featured in “Farm Collector,” a Kansas publication.

“Loretta finds a lot of the history about these implements on Google Books,” Sorensen said. “There are publications dating back to the 1850s that are available as PDF files. They can be downloaded for free and have a wealth of detail about implement design, the manufacturers and how the implements were used.”

In searching for details about his cultivator collection, the Sorensens learned that Jethro Tull, a farmer in England, came up with the idea for cultivating row crops. Tull designed what he called the first horse-drawn hoe. A more refined cultivator design came from George Esterly in 1860.

Other historical tidbits included the fact that the Ohio Cultivator Co. in Colum-

bus, Ohio, made the first commercial cultivator.

“When riding cultivator’s were first made, many farmers wouldn’t use them because they said their horses had enough to do already,” Sorensen says. “That’s why you see some early riding cultivators that farmers could either ride or walk behind.”

Sorensen also learned that one of his oldest cultivator’s is a Jenny Lind made by the Pattee Company. Because of the wide popularity of the music made by Sweden’s “Nightingale” in America, many company’s used her name to market products like cultivators, beds, tables, and chairs, etc.

The Jenny Lind cultivator weighed less than other models and allowed farmers to walk on either side of a crop row. Sorensen intends to preserve the cultivator as a display piece.

Sorensen’s horses still earn their keep, planting five acres of corn and five acres of oats each year. While the availability of the vintage equipment Sorensen has acquired is shrinking, there are companies that still produce modern versions of the horse-drawn implements.

“World War II took so many men off the farm there wasn’t enough man power to use horses,” Sorensen said.

“Equipment companies that were making tractors then stopped making horse-drawn equipment, forcing farmers to transition to tractors. But there is a company in Dalton, Ohio, which makes a full line of equipment today. Most of their customers are Amish.”

The draft horse industry has also shrunk in recent years. While there are still many draft horse owners in America, few use the big horses to farm. Sorensen expects to continue working his teams and raising at least some of their feed every year.

“Over the next year, we’ll dig into the history of our plows,” Sorensen said. “The time and effort that it takes is well worth learning about the people who came up with these implement designs. They were very innovative. The basic design of plows and planters are still the same.

“And since plows and cultivators are rarely used on the farm today, this is a good way to preserve some of the information behind them,” he added.

YOUR NEWS!

The Press and Dakotan

MMC

From Page 1A

residential areas as we can,” Skuza said. “If we miss a house and they still want to donate, they can drop it off at the MMC Student Affairs office.”

Donations can also be dropped off Monday, Nov. 2 at The Raven, located in Roncalli.

The event is promoted on campus as a chance to gather service hours, a requirement for each MMC student. Ap-

Wind

From Page 2A

The commissioners noted a wind farm could be constructed even with passage of the ordinance, but the county would have some controls with a wind ordinance. Without Article 17, wind developers would need only a conditional-use permit, the commissioners added.

Discussion was held on possibly changing the proposed 1,000 feet setback to 1,500 feet.

The Bon Homme County Commissioners could decide to amend the ordinance to 1,500 feet at the second reading, according to McGinnis.

The county could also decide to amend the ordinance at any other time down the line, he added.

If the commissioners give Article 17 its second reading and approval, it must be published twice in the county’s designated newspapers for legal publications.

The ordinance then goes into effect 20 days later, according to Kea Warne, the South Dakota deputy secretary of state for elections. The 20-day period begins on the day after the completed publication. State law contains some exceptions allowing for immediate imple-

Vermillion

From Page 3A

that are going to invest in their employees because it is their employees that will be the members of the community and will give back to the community.”

He said VCDC is trying to determine what are the best strategies for growing entrepreneurship in Vermillion.

“We are, right now, looking at what is the best way to make this a very entrepreneurial friendly, start-up friendly community,” Welch said. “The city and the state are both very business friendly, so we have that going for us, but we have to ask how can we support the businesses and help them be successful.

“A study that was done out of the University of Minnesota did a density study of each county in the country and if you look at the map, the denser the growth the darker the color. As you can guess if you look at the overall growth in the country, the denser growth was on the coasts. But, if you look at the 30 to 35 year-old range, it completely inverted the map. Which means

Calling All Cooks!

The Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan will be publishing a cookbook in December. This cookbook will not only feature recipes from *The Neighbor Lady Wynn Speece* but also local, regional, state and national celebrities as well as our reader submitted recipes. A fun and informative cookbook you'll want to be part of.

This cookbook will be distributed in the Wednesday, December 23 Press & Dakotan. We would like to have your submissions by November 20th. We thank you in advance for your consideration in participating in this cookbook.

You may use the following methods to submit your recipes:

Email: nicole.myers@yankton.net
or mail to:

YANKTON DAILY PRESS & DAKOTAN
Attn: Cookbook
319 Walnut Street
Yankton, SD 57078

HEALTH INSURANCE INSIGHT #57

JELLY BEANS CAN GET STUCK

So *this* happened
...and then you realized your coverage was less than ideal.

You don't need to stick with an old plan that doesn't fit your needs anymore. Things change after you have kids and so should your coverage. In fact, better coverage is less expensive than you'd think. Avera Health Plans can help you switch to a plan that works for your family and offers preventive screenings and tools so you're ready for anything. — even a rogue jelly bean.

Live better. Live balanced. Avera.

COMPARE AND SAVE ON A PLAN.
Call us at 605-413-4954
or talk to your local agent.

Avera Health Plans
AveraHealthPlans.com