## the midwest

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## Nebraska Diverts **Platte Floodwater**

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) -Floodwaters have surged to record heights in western Nebraska over the past few days, but the damage could have been worse if some of the water hadn't been diverted out of the rivers.

The Nebraska Department of Natural Resources worked with a half dozen irrigation districts along the South Platte, North Platte and Platte rivers to divert water once it became clear the river would flood.

The department's Jesse Bradley says it's not immediately clear how much water was diverted, but officials were doing everything they could to limit flooding.

The irrigation districts opened up canals along the river for floodwaters. That water will soak into the ground and help recharge the underground aquifer.

The water will continue to flow into those canals for a couple weeks.

## Aberdeen Getting **Health Care Clinic**

ABERDEEN (AP) - A nonprofit organization that provides affordable health care at 18 medical and dental clinics in South Dakota is expanding into Aberdeen.

Howard-based Horizon Health Care Inc. has been awarded an \$810,000 federal grant to open the clinic and will receive additional funding to operate it. The clinic will provide services on a sliding fee scale, meaning patients will be billed based on their ability to pay. Horizon Chief Operat-

ing Officer Jeff Mengenhausen tells the American *News* that the organization will hire seven employees in Aberdeen. A clinic site is still being selected.

The clinic is to open by early next year.

## Speech Critical Of Israel Will Go On

BROOKINGS (AP) - A critic of Israel who speaks widely on the subject will give a presentation at the Brookings Public Library without the backing of the South Dakota World Affairs Council.

The council initially scheduled Alison Weir's appearance on Wednesday but then canceled the event. Board Chairman Nels Granholm tells the Argus Leader officials were worried the move could be construed as censorship but that isn't the case. He says the council couldn't find someone credible to give an opposing view to Weir. Weir says she often hears about attempts to block her talks, but this is one of the only times a sponsor has backed out. She calls it "shocking." Weir's talk will go on, sponsored by The Council for the National Interest. Weir is president of the group.

## Press&Dakotan

# **Educators Testify On Spending**

#### **BY BOB MERCER** State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — The fastest way to reduce financial problems in many South Dakota school districts is to finish restoring the state aid that was cut 8.6 percent in 2011 by the Legislature, leaders for two statewide school organizations told a panel of lawmakers Monday.

They said about \$23 million is needed to return to the \$4,805 per-student allocation that comes from state aid and the general-education tax on property.

"It isn't a big leap. It's very close to what you did (this) year," Wade Pogany, executive director for the Associated School Boards of South Dakota, told the legislators.

Pogany said he and Rob Munson from the School Administrators of South Dakota made the \$4,805 request to Gov. Dennis Daugaard.

The PSA was raised to \$4,805 for the 2010 school year and frozen for 2011. Next came the cut to \$4,390 for 2012 as the governor called for 10 percent cuts throughout state government and the Legislature took steep precautions during the recession.

The PSA was restored somewhat to \$4,491 for 2013. Legislators also provided substantial amounts of other short-term funding for schools this year.

Currently state aid is due for a 1.6 percent inflationary increase - approximately



PHOTO: BOB MERCER Parkston superintendent Shayne McIntosh was among those testifying at a hearing in Pierre Monday about the state's public school funding formula

\$5.3 million — for the coming year, unless the Legislature provides more. "That won't help our

schools any," said Sen. Chuck Welke, D-Warner, a retired educator. He added, "We're starving our schools to death and it's time we take some action.'

State law calls for the PSA to increase by the rate of inflation but no more than 3 percent. Another committee member, Rep. Bill Van Gerpen, R-Tyndall, said the Legislature should follow the law – a reference to the two years of the freeze and the cut.

The legislative committee chaired by Rep. Jacquelyn Sly, R-Rapid City, is assigned to look at an unusual mix of issues including use of capital outlay levies and opt-out

levies by school districts. Capital outlay levies originally were intended for onetime expenses but the Legislature in allowed more

flexibility because of the state-aid cut. Opt-out levies can be used for general purposes but are subject to a local vote, because they exceed the statewide maximums set by the Legislature each year

for general-education levies. The Sioux Falls business manager and school superintendents for Tea, Milbank, Custer, Estelline, Burke and Custer on Monday detailed for the legislative committee the financial difficulties their districts are facing and their usage – or not – of capital outlay levies, opt-outs and

reserve funds to offset rev-

The presentations showed how they are patching together budgets while oftentimes making cuts in personnel, creating larger classes, freezing salaries and assigning multiple duties to the remaining teachers and administrators.

Parkston superintendent Shayne McIntosh said his board developed budgets to reflect declining enrollment without any idea there would be an 8.6 percent cut in state aid. So far the Parkston board hasn't sought an opt-out.

"We planned our best," McIntosh said. "We just couldn't do both. I don't know what to tell my taxpayers.'

A common theme in the testimony was increasing difficulty retaining solid teachers and attracting quality applicants for vacancies. The denominator seemed to be pay. Base salaries range from \$26,000-plus in some small rural districts to as much as \$35,870 at Yankton.

Several superintendents including Scott Lepke of Custer said they see test scores falling. Lepke said his district

covers 1,208 square miles and has about 865 students. The large property-tax base means very little state aid to the district, but Lepke said an opt-out probably would fail because 73 percent of the households in the district don't have children.

Instead Custer has been

reducing spending wherever possible. "We currently offer

a bare-bones education and we can't afford to offer many of the opportunities the students are interested in," Lepke said.

The Burke district gets by with a high school 75 years old and a middle school 60 years old. Local voters accepted a \$300,000 opt-out in exchange for a reduction in the capital outlay levy to \$231,000, superintendent Erik Person said.

Those are big parts of a \$1.8 million overall budget. "We just need to fund our programs and hope our buildings hold together," Person said.

At Milbank superintendent Tim Graf said they have "nowhere else to cut." Voters rejected two opt-outs and the district is using the liberalized capital outlay to help cover a structural deficit that Graf es-timated at \$350,000 to \$450,000.

Graf told the legislators every additional dollar of state aid would help, whether to increase teacher salaries, reduce class sizes or restore programs. "But which way we would go with those dollars. we'd have to debate internally," he said.

Estelline has two opt-outs that are providing \$145,000 on a permanent basis and \$350,000 for two more years. Voters are paying about \$2 of additional opt-out taxes on every \$1,000 of property value, according to superintendent Pat Kraning.



### **US District Judge** Leaving Omaha

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A U.S. district judge has announced his intention to take senior status, creating an opening on the federal bench in Omaha.

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Judge Joseph Bataillon says he'll maintain a full caseload after he takes senior status on Oct. 3 next year.

Chief District Judge Laurie Smith Camp says she's grateful that Bataillon "has chosen to remain with the court in senior status, continuing to build on his impressive legacy."

Bataillon has been one of Nebraska's three regular district judges since Octo-ber 1997, after being selected by President Bill Clinton and confirmed by the U.S. Senate. Nebraska has three senior judges: Warren Urbom, Richard Kopf and Lyle Strom.

Bataillon's replacement will be nominated by President Barack Obama, typically after conferring with Nebraska's two U.S. senators, Mike Johanns and Deb Fischer.

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