

South Dakota

School Groups Propose Tax Hike For Teacher Pay

BY BOB MERCER
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — Leaders for several of South Dakota's major education organizations called Monday for a sales tax increase each summer dedicated to raising teacher salaries.

An additional 1 percent state sales tax during June, July and August would currently generate about \$40 million, according to Wade Pogany, executive director for the Associated School Boards of South Dakota.

He said teachers would receive salary increases of \$4,000 apiece. There are approximately 10,000 certified K-12 teachers in South Dakota.

The average teacher salary in South Dakota is more than \$8,000 behind North Dakota and was lowest in the nation at \$39,580 in a January compilation.

"We're asking you, help us do something along this line," Pogany told the legislative panel.

Fully supporting the concept of the summertime tax for teachers are the School Administrators of South Dakota and a group called South Dakota United School Association representing about 100 school districts.

Mary McCorkle, the new president of the South Dakota Education Association that represents teachers and other school staff, said she hadn't seen the proposal until the legislative meeting and wasn't prepared to take a public position on it. McCorkle emphasized

School Reserves Climb For Decade

BY BOB MERCER
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — The money that South Dakota school districts hold in reserve as unobligated general funds increased 10 years in a row and stood at a record \$220.6 million in 2013, according to a report delivered Monday by the state Department of Legislative Audit.

The Legislature removed limits on unobligated general funds in 2011. In the two years since, the statewide total of unobligated general funds went up \$23 million.

State Auditor General Marty Guindon presented the information at the request of the Legislature's Planning Committee. Its members are considering school funding and teacher pay issues.

Guindon said school districts have a variety of reasons for the amounts of reserves they hold, such as management decisions, unexpected expenses, tax opt-outs and inaccurate budgeting.

He said his agency would offer workshops to help school personnel improve their budgeting.

Unobligated general funds among the school districts were nearly \$199 million in 1998 and 1999. The Legislature put restrictions in place in 2001. By 2003 the reserves were down to \$123.1 million. But then they started increasing again.

Sen. Corey Brown, R-Gettysburg, said the numbers indicate that \$37 million of state aid to schools in the past five years wound up in school reserves rather than paying for salaries and other expenses.

The discussion of reserves came on the same day that three school organizations proposed to the committee a \$40 million sales-tax increase to pay school teachers \$4,000 more apiece.

Guindon noted that state aid rose \$91 million from 1999 to 2013 and schools' costs for health care went up \$44 million during the same span.

"I found that to be an interesting number," he said.

Guindon analyzed the amounts of unobligated general funds by school enrollments.

He said the two largest school districts, Sioux Falls and Rapid City, were about 20 percent.

The group of districts with the next largest enrollments, such as Aberdeen, Watertown, Yankton, Mitchell, Pierre, Sturgis and Spearfish, averaged 28.39 percent in 2013.

The percentages grew larger still as the enrollments grew smaller in the three other groups, with the under-250 enrollment school districts averaging 47 percent. He said there was great variability among the districts in those three groups too.

there are teacher shortages in South Dakota. "It's not coming. We all know. It's here," she said.

School districts along South Dakota's borders are losing teachers to better pay in neighboring states, according to Mitch Richter, a former legislator now with the United School Association.

Whether the legislative

committee endorses the plan or something like it won't be decided for months. The panel's chairman, Rep. Scott Munsterman, R-Brookings, said the next meeting wouldn't be until after November elections.

South Dakota voters rejected a measure in 2012 that would have increased the state sales tax from 4 percent to 5 percent on most

items year-round. The money was to be split between school districts and Medicaid.

The vote two years ago was 151,498 yes and 198,586 no. Richter said exit polling showed voters supported more money for schools but didn't want to give hospitals more for Medicaid.

Yankton Broadcasting Firm Honored

SIoux FALLS (AP) — Broadcasters from Sioux Falls and Yankton have been honored for their contributions to the industry.

The South Dakota Broadcasters Association named Riverfront Broadcasting owners Carolyn and Doyle Becker broadcasters of the year. The company includes KYNT-AM, KKYA-FM and KDAM-FM in Yankton; KCCR-AM, KCCR-FM and KLXS-FM in Pierre; and KORN-AM and KQRN-FM in Mitchell.

SDBA and the Contemporary Media & Journalism Department of the University of South Dakota also awarded KDLT-TV news anchor Tom Hanson with the 2014 Tom Brokaw Award.

The awards were given out over the weekend at the association's state convention in Sioux Falls.

SD Spring Wheat Harvest Is Lagging

SIoux FALLS (AP) — Spring wheat harvest in South Dakota is lagging behind totals from last year at the time and the five-year average.

The Agriculture Department says in its weekly crop report that spring wheat harvested was at 88 percent, behind the five-year average and last year's figure of 99 percent.

Barley harvested was at 89 percent, trailing the five-year average of 98 percent and the 96 percent figure from last year.

Pasture and range conditions were rated 12 percent excellent, 56 percent good, 26 percent fair, 5 percent poor and 1 percent very poor.

The report says below-normal temperatures persisted across most of the state.

Man Dies After Breaking Into Home

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Authorities say a 48-year-old man has died in a shooting after he broke into an Omaha home.

The Omaha Police Department says officers were called to the home Monday morning. They found 48-year-old Darrell W. Miller on the porch with a gunshot wound. He was taken to a local hospital where he was pronounced dead.

Police say in a report that officers responding to the scene were advised by dispatch that a homeowner shot an intruder at the home. Miller was later identified as the intruder. The homeowner has been identified as 48-year-old Larry Rohatsch.

Police say the case remains under investigation.

Mitchell Man Charged In Wife's Death

MITCHELL (AP) — A 49-year-old Mitchell man is accused of killing his wife.

Donald McDougal is charged in Davison County with alternate counts of first- and second-degree murder. Police say McDougal was arrested over the weekend.

Authorities say the body of Janie McDougal was discovered at a Mitchell apartment on Sept. 1 after a neighbor called police.

Mitchell Police Lt. Don Everson declined to release further details. He says the investigation is ongoing.

First-degree murder carries a maximum penalty of death or life in prison. Second-degree murder is punishable by life in prison.

The Davison County clerk's office says a lawyer has not yet been appointed for Donald McDougal.

Another SD Prison Inmate Found Dead

SIoux FALLS (AP) — A man serving a life sentence for fatally shooting his girlfriend was found dead in his prison cell, bringing to three the number of South Dakota prison inmates who have died in a week, according to the Department of Corrections.

Kent Davidson, 37, was found dead at the South Dakota State Penitentiary early Monday morning, authorities said.

The death is under investigation by the Division of Criminal Investigation and an autopsy will be conducted, officials said in a statement.

Davidson pleaded guilty to first-degree murder in April. Authorities said Davidson shot 26-year-old Crystal Schulz in the head on March 11, 2013. Her body was found three days later in a shed at her mother's place.

Davidson was arrested hours later after a standoff with police.

Court documents said Davidson and Schulz were engaged, but Schulz was ending their relationship.

Davidson also was serving a five-year sentence for forgery out of Tripp County and a five-year sentence for second-degree escape out of Minnehaha County.

James McVay, 44, was found hanging in his cell overnight in the South Dakota State Penitentiary on Thursday, corrections officials said. He was formally sentenced to death in May.

McVay had pleaded guilty, but mentally ill, to murder in the 2011 stabbing of 75-year-old Maybelle Schein. McVay said he killed Schein and stole her car as part of his plan to drive to Washington and kill the president. He was later arrested in Madison, Wisconsin.

An autopsy is being done to determine how convicted arsonist Leo Christensen, 59, died at the Mike Durfee State Prison in Springfield. Christensen became ill at the prison on Tuesday and was transported by ambulance then airlifted to a Sioux Falls hospital, where he died the next day.

Christensen was sentenced in 2003 to 50 years in prison for first-degree arson.

Nebraska

Sister Gets Protection Order Against Lt. Gov.

BY GRANT SCHULTE
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — A judge granted a protection order Monday against Nebraska Lt. Gov. Lavon Heidemann after his sister accused him of grabbing her wrists and pushing her out of their mother's home.

District Court Judge Daniel E. Bryan Jr. approved it after Heidemann's sister, Lois Bohling, said in a sworn statement that her brother acted in a threatening manner and assaulted her during a prolonged dispute over farmland and their 84-year-old mother's care.

Heidemann, an Elk Creek farmer, is looking to return to his position in state government as the running mate of Republican gubernatorial candidate Pete Ricketts. The two are running against Democratic hopeful Chuck Hassebrook and his running mate, Jane Raybould.

In a statement released by the governor's office, Heidemann said he disputes many of his sister's statements, but he did not elaborate. Email and phone messages left with the Ricketts campaign were not immediately returned.



Heidemann

about how to disperse their deceased father's property. Bohling contends that Heidemann shouted at her and nearly came over the table at her, "like a wild man," which frightened her. From that point forward, she said tried to avoid her brother because he frightened her.

In August, Bohling said she prepared papers to terminate a lease on land that Heidemann and one of his brothers had farmed. All of the siblings had agreed to the arrangement, but Bohling said she learned on Aug. 18 that Heidemann was angry that the notice had been sent, according to the statement.

Bohling alleges Heidemann physically assaulted her on Aug. 19 at their mother's home. Bohling, who described herself as their mother's primary care-

giver, said she saw Heidemann drive up shortly after 12:30 p.m. as their mother was preparing for an afternoon nap. She said she tried to leave but encountered Heidemann in the bedroom.

According to the statement, Bohling left the room but returned after she overheard Heidemann talking with their mother about her prescription drugs. Bohling said she had just been to a pharmacist to get the drugs, when Heidemann charged at her.

According to the statement, Heidemann began shouting at his sister and she raised her hands instinctively to protect herself.

"He was screaming at me with his face no more than six inches from my face," Bohling said in the statement, dated Aug. 27. "He was forcefully holding on to both of my arms at the wrist area and screamed, 'YOU STAY AWAY FROM HER.'"

Heidemann then allegedly walked with his sister to the door and pushed her out. Bohling said she fled to her vehicle and left.

Bohling alleged that their mother tried to bring the two together again on Aug. 21 to

"talk it out," but Bohling said she was afraid of more physical violence.

"Until it is obvious or proven that he no longer has a problem controlling his anger, I want Lavon to stay away from me, my husband and my children," she said.

Heidemann released a statement through the governor's office on Monday that said he disputes many of his sister's assertions. It did not elaborate.

"This is a private, legal family matter regarding disagreements resulting from my dad's estate, as well as the best possible medical treatment for my mom," Heidemann said. "I dispute much of my sister's claims. My immediate family has great support from the rest of our family, our church and our friends — we appreciate that support so very much in this difficult time, as we work toward a full resolution."

Heidemann, 55, was appointed to the lieutenant governor's position in February 2013. He previously served eight years as a state senator, and was elected to the University of Nebraska Board of Regents shortly before he was chosen for his current post.

Midwest Railcar Shortage Debate Shifts To DC


SIoux FALLS (AP) — Midwestern lawmakers and farmers are shifting the attention of a railcar shortage problem to Washington with proposed legislation, a committee hearing and meetings with decision makers.

South Dakota Sen. John Thune says he's co-sponsoring legislation to give the National Surface Transportation Board more efficiency and authority.

Among the proposed changes: increase the STB's investigative authority, so it can do its own investigations instead of waiting for a complaint; improve rate review timelines; and increase the number of members from three to five.

The commerce committee will also hold a hearing Wednesday that will examine rail service backlogs nationwide.

And Farmers Union members from around the country are pressing the rail issue with members of Congress, staffers in the United States Department of Agriculture and White House, and the STB.



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