

## Council Approves New SF Police Chief

SIoux FALLS (AP) — The Sioux Falls City Council has formally appointed Matt Burns as the city's new chief of police. Mayor Mike Huether announced his decision to appoint Burns to the post in August. *The Argus Leader* reports that city council members made that selection official on Tuesday night. Longtime chief Doug Barthel is stepping down after more than 12 years at the helm of the police department and almost 30 years on the force. Burns has been with the Sioux Falls police department since 1996 and has held many positions. Most recently, he was selected as the new assistant police chief in February of this year. Burns says he's honored and grateful to lead the department, which has worked hard to build a professional relationship with residents.

## Trial Set In Fatal Nebraska City Stabbing

NEBRASKA CITY, Neb. (AP) — A January trial has been scheduled for a 20-year-old man accused of stabbing to death a Nebraska City resident. Nebraska City radio station *KNCY* reports that Sebastien Hall pleaded not guilty Tuesday to second-degree murder and a weapons charge. The trial is set to begin Jan. 6. Prosecutors say Hall killed 21-year-old Jacob Adams on July 19. Prosecutors say Adams was fighting with Hall and another man, 22-year-old Dylan Boyle, when Adams was stabbed in the chest and throat. Boyle has pleaded not guilty to an assault charge.

## Parked Truck Causes \$200K In Damage

SIoux FALLS (AP) — Authorities say a parked semi-truck with failed brakes caused more than \$200,000 worth of damage in Sioux Falls after rolling down a hill and striking a half dozen cars in a parking lot. Sioux Falls police say the truck was parked on West 38th Street to support a crane doing maintenance work at Augustana University's Kirkeby-Over Stadium. When the truck's brakes failed at about 5 p.m. Tuesday, it rolled down a hill toward the north side of the Good Samaritan Society building, striking six unoccupied vehicles and pushing one of them into the building. No injuries were reported. Police say the operator of the semi was cited for safeguarding an unattended vehicle.

## Man Must Pay \$100K That Marred Tattoo

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A man who marred his ex-girlfriend's "Happiness is a warm gun" tattoo when he shot her has been ordered to pay \$100,000 for her pain and suffering. Thirty-three-year-old Paul Boye is serving 10 to 15 years for assault stemming from the Feb. 2, 2014, shooting of Andrea Eberspacher. She sued him, and in June he was found civilly liable and was ordered to pay nearly \$20,000 for her medical bills. Another trial was set to determine whether he should pay more money for her pain, suffering, inconvenience and loss of companionship. The *Lincoln Journal Star* says a jury awarded her \$100,000 on Tuesday. Her attorney has said an incision made for treatment of her abdominal wounds left a scar that bisected the tattoo.

## Council Approves 1.5 Property Tax Hike

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — The Rapid City Council has approved a 1.5 percent property tax hike that will bring an additional \$225,000 into the city's coffers. *KOTA-TV* reports that some members argued Tuesday night that the increase was needed so the city could maintain current services. Council member Charity Doyle noted that worker's comp insurance for the fire department alone was going up more than the amount of the hike, which matches the consumer price index increase. Council member Steve Laurenti says he could not support raising taxes because there has not been a case made to justify the increase. The \$156 million spending plan for 2016 passed on a 7-3 vote. In approving the city's budget, council members also voted to strip raises for themselves.

## Ex-PA Announcer Pleads Not Guilty

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — The former public address announcer at Nebraska's Memorial Stadium in Lincoln has pleaded not guilty to theft and other charges. Fifty-year-old Patrick Combs is accused of bilking hundreds of thousands of dollars from two elderly women. Court records say Combs has waived formal arraignment and asked the court to enter pleas of not guilty. Authorities say Combs spent about \$363,000 of the women's money on cars, home repairs and gifts. He's charged with two counts of theft and one count of attempted theft, abuse of a vulnerable adult and unauthorized use of a financial transaction device. His attorney, Bob Creager, has said police and prosecutors rushed to judgment and filed unfounded charges against Combs. Creager says Combs was a lifelong family friend of one of the women.

## Transportation Advocate To Be Honored

PIERRE (AP) — A state senator from Mitchell is going to be inducted into the South Dakota Transportation Hall of Honor. The South Dakota Department of Transportation said Tuesday that a banquet for state Sen. Mike Vehle will be held Oct. 8 in Mitchell. Vehle will be the 84th South Dakotan to be inducted. Vehle has served in the Legislature for 11 years. The department says in his tenure, the Republican has led efforts to address the state's long-term transportation funding needs. He has chaired the Senate Transportation Committee and, most recently, Vehle pushed in this year's legislative session to drastically increase funding for South Dakota's ailing roads and bridges. Gov. Dennis Daugaard has said he can't think of another legislator who has committed such an effort to a single issue.

## No Charges Pending In Girl's Drowning

GRAND ISLAND, Neb. (AP) — Hall County prosecutors say no criminal charges will be filed in the drowning of a 5-year-old Lincoln girl at a Grand Island water park. Hall County Attorney Jack Zitterkopf said in a news release Tuesday that Nubari Koffree's drowning has been ruled accidental. Nubari was with her mother at the Island Oasis Water Park on July 18. The little girl was found in the wave pool area. Grand Island spokeswoman Wendy Meyer says the wave pool operates in 10-minute intervals and was not running at the time of the accident. Officials have said it was the first drowning to occur in the 21 years the water park has been open.

## GRANT SCHULTE

Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Nebraska electric customers could end up with lower monthly bills if the state allowed private firms into the market with its public power utilities, energy consultants and executives said Wednesday. The companies convened in Lincoln for a symposium to discuss Nebraska's status as the nation's only state which relies entirely on public utilities. Nebraska is still one of the nation's cheapest states for energy but has seen rate increases in recent years, raising concerns that it's losing a competitive edge. The state now has higher average prices than neighboring Iowa, which relies on private, for-profit utilities. Consultants at the symposium said Nebraska could see rate reductions totaling \$250 million to \$400 million a year by allowing more companies to compete and drive down prices. Many cities and rural electric associations are now being asked to sign new 20-year contracts with the state's public utilities, which the consultants say is too long a commitment

## Program Offers Alternative Sentencing For Drug Offenses

ABERDEEN (AP) — Judges in the Aberdeen area have a new alternate sentencing option available for those who abuse drugs. The Hawaii-based HOPE program, which began in South Dakota as a Walworth County pilot program, is being used in Walworth, Campbell, Brown, Charles Mix, Tripp and Gregory counties, the *Aberdeen American News* reported. Judge Scott Myren, presiding judge of the 5th Judicial Circuit, said officials were

looking for a program that could be used without taxing courts with limited resources. "It's about using our resources wisely," Myren said. "I really feel good about what we're doing. We're making more informed decisions, and the money goes further." Those convicted of drug offenses must complete the requirements of the HOPE program in lieu of prison time. Participants call in each day to determine if they are required to give a urine sample to local law enforcement.

"It's an enhanced level of supervision that requires more testing," Myren said. If the sample tests positive for drugs, the participant gets immediate jail time until they're seen by a judge. Myren said those few days in jail have an impact, and the program appears to be working. He said the program allows participants to keep their jobs and maintain their relationships with family. It's most effective for drug abusers who can stop, as opposed to addicts who need

more intense treatment, he said. "Abusers will show they can modify their behavior," Myren said. "Addicts get caught right away." HOPE is an acronym for Hawaii Opportunity for Probation Enforcement. The probation program was enacted in South Dakota through state legislation in 2013. Myren said he hopes all 10 counties in the 5th Circuit will participate in the next year.

## Outside Firm To Examine State Agency's Contracts

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska State Auditor Charlie Janssen says an outside firm will be hired to audit a state agency's contracts with his company to avoid any perceived conflicts of interest. Janssen's company, RTG Medical, holds more than \$945,000 in contracts with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, including two worth more than \$422,000 that started after he took office in January. He has said a blind trust keeps him unaware of his company's daily dealings and protects him from potential conflicts of interest. But some at the State Capitol have questioned how that's possible since the contracts are a matter of public record

and Janssen's brother also is a leader at the company. Messages seeking comment from Janssen have been left by the *Lincoln Journal Star*. In his Friday letter to the Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure Commission, Janssen maintains that there's no conflict of interest under the law. "Nevertheless, for the sake of transparency, I have directed APA staff to contract with an outside independent audit firm to carry out the financial examination work at DHHS for the RTG Medical contracts and related services utilized by that agency," Janssen wrote. "By doing so, I have effectively removed myself from the oversight of that audit

work — thereby ensuring that it will be performed independently, without the possibility of any actual or perceived conflict of interest on my part." His letter also asks the commission if such an arrangement would "effectively mitigate any potential conflicts of interest or other concerns" or whether he needs to take additional steps. The commission's executive director, Frank Daley, said its staff could provide an informal advisory opinion later this month. Daley said if Janssen wants a formal opinion from the commissioners themselves, it would probably take until at least Oct. 16, the date of their next meeting.

## Village Of Pilger Faces Reduced Tax Revenue After Tornado

PILGER, Neb. (AP) — Last summer's tornado that destroyed much of Pilger has left the village facing an uphill battle in the coming year due to reduced property tax revenue. But as crews work to replace homes that were damaged in the June 2014 tornado and businesses look to fill the now empty Main Street, the assessed value of property in the community is expected to increase, making Pilger's future outlook much brighter than the current one. The tornado had de-

stroyed about 40 percent of the homes in Pilger, the *Norfolk Daily News* reported. The valuation of taxable property in the community stood at more than \$10.6 million in 2014. This year, due to the high loss of property, the valuation was more than \$7.8 million. Any property that exists on Jan. 1 remains on the tax rolls for a full year. In Pilger's case, homes and businesses that existed on Jan. 1, 2014, were still taxed this year as if they still exist, when many don't. To some homeowners'

dismay, there's no provision in Nebraska law to lower taxes on property damaged by natural disasters, said Stanton County Assessor Cheryl Wolverton. Some residents have moved away, abandoning their property. As taxes for those properties aren't paid, they will come up delinquent. The lower 2015 valuation total and the wait for delinquent properties to receive new owners translate into lean times for governmental entities that rely on property taxes.

Still, president Gene Willers of Midwest Bank, said that he believes that time will make all the difference. The Pilger-based bank is one of the businesses that has posted its blueprints on Main Street. It's not the only one; other plans in the works include a new combination community center and senior citizens center, a convenience store and a restaurant, among other businesses. "I'm upbeat about Pilger's future, because of all the new building going on here," Willers said.

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