

Senate fails to override Obama's veto of pipeline bill

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Republican-controlled Senate has failed to override President Barack Obama's veto of a bill approving the Keystone XL oil pipeline. The 62-37 vote Wednesday was the latest chapter in the fight between the GOP-led Congress and the White House over energy policy. It was the first of many possible veto showdowns to come in Obama's final term. Proponents of the bill have said since its introduction that they didn't have the vote of two-thirds of the Senate needed to override Obama's veto. The \$8-billion pipeline would transport oil harvested from Canada's tar sands to pipelines linked to Gulf Coast refineries. Obama said that the bill circumvented the well-established process for approving cross-border pipelines, which must be determined to be in the national interest.

Survey says Nebraska ag land value down 3 percent over year

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A new survey report says the average value of Nebraska's agriculture land dropped 3 percent in the past year. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln report released Wednesday says that as of February 1st, the land value was \$3,210 an acre, compared with the 2014 average of \$3,416. In the report, university Extension educator Jim Jansen says "bearish comments reported by survey participants" on cropland values reflected the decline in grain prices. And he says land used for the cow-calf industry rose in value or held steady "due to a strong return in that market over the last one to two years." The survey respondents included real estate salespeople and brokers, appraisers, bankers and mortgage experts.

Irrigation district predicts farmers should get full amount

HOLDREGE, Neb. (AP) — The managers of Nebraska's biggest reservoir expect to be able to give farmers the full amount of irrigation water this year, but that forecast could still change this spring. The Kearney Hub reports civil engineer Cory Steinke told the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District board that Lake McConaughy is in good shape at this stage and 77 percent full. But it's hard to predict how much water will flow into the lake this spring. Steinke says snowpack in the North Platte River basin is at 79 percent of normal while the South Platte basin's snowpack is above normal at 108 percent. Farmers served by the irrigation district are expecting up to 18 inches of water an acre during the growing season.

Nebraska businesses sign pledge for LGBT equality

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — About 100 Omaha businesses and organizations have signed a pledge with the Human Rights Campaign to advance workplace equality for Nebraska's LGBT community. According to local field organizer Drew Heckman, 113 local businesses have signed the pledge which is a part of its "Equality is Our Business" campaign. The campaign is targeting states like Nebraska, Arkansas, Mississippi and Alabama that do not have statewide regulations to protect workers from discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation. According

to a Human Rights Campaign survey, more than 40 percent of LGBT Nebraskans say they have experienced harassment at work. The Omaha World-Herald reports groups that pledge receive stickers and invitations to educational programs sponsored by the advocacy group.

Murder victim relatives seek end to Nebraska's death penalty

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraskans whose relatives were murdered are calling on lawmakers to abolish the death penalty, saying it prolongs the suffering of victims' families and wastes tax dollars on endless appeals. Relatives rallied at the Capitol on Wednesday came in advance of a legislative hearing on a bill to end capital punishment. Miriam Thimm Kelle, whose brother James Thimm was murdered by Michael Ryan at a farm near Rulo in 1985, says the death penalty has distracted from the needs of victims' families. The repeal bill was introduced by longtime Senator Ernie Chambers of Omaha, who has fought for nearly four decades to end capital punishment. Of the 33 Nebraska inmates sentenced to death since 1973, three have been executed.

Nebraska senators advance bill to raise Medicaid allowance

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A bill to increase allowances for blind, elderly and disabled Nebraska Medicaid recipients has cleared a first-round vote in the Legislature. Lawmakers voted 29-12 to advance a measure by Senator Patty Pansing Brooks of Lincoln that would increase the monthly amount from \$50 to \$60. Opponents call the measure piecemeal Medicaid expansion and say lawmakers should instead use the money for tax cuts. Advocates say the rate that hasn't been adjusted for inflation in 30 years, and the bill will allow disabled recipients to buy clothing and toiletries. Pansing Brooks says the debate lasted longer than she expected. She says opponents used the bill as a rallying cry to set a "fiscally conservative tone" for the session.

Nebraska senator fears bill criminalizes trafficked victims

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — One Nebraska senator says a measure prioritized by the Nebraska attorney general could undo years of efforts to decriminalize victims of sex trafficking. A legislative committee heard public testimony Wednesday on the bill that would allow courts to mandate treatment options for juveniles who have been trafficked. Currently courts cannot enforce prescribed treatment, such as mental health services. Committee member Omaha Senator Bob Krist worked on earlier legislation that kept victims from being classified as criminals and out of a juvenile justice system that he says is unprepared to address their specific needs. He says he worries even rehabilitative detainment worsens trauma by treating victims like criminals. Advocates of the bill by Senator Jim Scheer of Norfolk say many juveniles who have been trafficked flee centers or foster homes within hours. The bill is LB294.

Nebraska lawmakers advance black-tailed prairie dog repeal

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A prairie-dog management law criticized by Nebraska wildlife advocates could be in jeopardy. Nebraska lawmakers voted 32-12 on Wednesday to advance a bill that would repeal the 2012 law. The law gives counties the option to control the spread of black-tailed prairie dogs when a landowner's neighbors complain. Only Sheridan County has taken advantage of its provisions. The animals are an ecologically important native species that some ranchers view as pests. Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha says he introduced the repeal measure because the current law is too vague and runs afoul of property rights. Black-tailed prairie dogs are widespread in parts of northwest Nebraska, where they dig holes in ranchland. Wildlife groups support the repeal, while counties and ranching groups oppose it. The bill is LB128.

Mother of slain girl sues Omaha police over drug charge

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The mother of a 5-year-old girl killed last year by a stray bullet is suing two Omaha police officers and the city, accusing the officers of planting drugs to implicate her in a separate case. Tabatha Manning filed the lawsuit Monday. In it, Manning details being pulled over in September 2013 and arrested on a misdemeanor warrant for unpaid fines. Officers said they later found a bag containing a small amount of methamphetamine in the police car in which Manning was taken to jail and determined it was hers. Manning's lawsuit says the officers planted the drugs in order to falsely implicate her in a felony. The drug charge was later dropped. Months after her arrest, Manning's daughter was struck and killed at her home by a stray bullet.

Nebraska QB told to be ready for more passing, less running

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Tommy Armstrong Jr. remains Nebraska's top quarterback heading into coach Mike Riley's first spring practice with the Cornhuskers. Besides that, the offense is going to look much different as Riley begins installing a pro-style system when practice begins Saturday. Armstrong said Wednesday he won't get nearly the number of rushing attempts in the new offense. Armstrong ran 145 times in 2014, mostly on designed runs and zone-read keepers. Riley said he would divide the team into two groups for spring practices so he can familiarize himself with and better evaluate the players. Coaches will conduct two separate practices each day, with about 60 players on Team Red and 60 on Team White. The spring game is April 11.

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