

Effort to acquire Nebraska land for pipeline remain on hold

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The company trying to build a pipeline to carry Canadian oil south to the Gulf Coast says its efforts to force Nebraska landowners to agree to the project remain on hold because of several pending lawsuits. Earlier this month, a Holt County judge blocked TransCanada's eminent domain efforts there. Company spokesman Mark Cooper says TransCanada will agree to a similar order in York County at a hearing today. Cooper says TransCanada plans to ask judges in seven other Nebraska counties to delay action on its other eminent domain cases until the lawsuits are resolved. The proposed pipeline needs presidential approval before it could be built across Montana, South Dakota and Nebraska to connect with existing pipelines. It would carry more than 800,000 barrels of crude oil a day.

Nebraska cities, school boards oppose open ballot bills

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Lobbyists for Nebraska cities and school boards are fighting two bills that would require elected officials to disclose how they voted when picking leaders. Both groups faced sharp questioning from senators Wednesday as a legislative committee considered the proposals. Senator Bill Kintner of Papillion says the bills would ensure the public knows how lawmakers and other elected officials vote when choosing legislative committee chairmen, school board presidents and other leaders. Some lawmakers say Kintner, a Republican, is attempting to impose party discipline on moderate GOP lawmakers in the nonpartisan Legislature, an allegation he denies. The city and school board groups were grilled by committee members after arguing that the open votes for leadership roles could lead to conflicts among elected officials. The bills are LB646 and LB649.

Nebraska eyes Medicaid 'redesign' bill to close coverage gap

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Lawmakers who want to close Nebraska's health care coverage gap are taking a new approach after two previous attempts to expand Medicaid failed. Senator Kathy Campbell presented her Medicaid "redesign" bill to a committee Wednesday. It would require the state to apply for a federal waiver to develop its own Medicaid plan, as other states have done. Residents who fall into the coverage gap would be pulled into the current Medicaid program until the federal waiver is approved. The bill also would create a state task force to look for ways to deliver more efficient and effective care in the current Medicaid program. Administrators in Governor Pete Ricketts' administration opposed the bill, saying it relies on promises from the federal government. The bill is LB472.

Nebraska AG visiting western regions to discuss Colorado pot

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Attorney General Doug Peterson is slated to meet with western Nebraska law enforcement to discuss the impact of Colorado marijuana on the region. Peterson and his criminal bureau chief, John Freudenberg, will visit the region on Thursday and Friday.

Peterson has said he opposes Colorado's decision to legalize marijuana, and supports a lawsuit filed by Nebraska and Oklahoma to have it declared unconstitutional. Colorado's decision has riled some western Nebraska law enforcement officers who say marijuana coming into Nebraska has increased their workload. Peterson is expected to visit Chadron and Gering on Thursday and Sidney and North Platte on Friday.

Nebraska child advocates say court shackles traumatize kids

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Juvenile lawyers and advocates say Nebraska children as young as 10 are treated more harshly in court than adult offenders. Lawmakers heard testimony Wednesday on a bill by Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha that would prohibit restraints on juveniles during court appearances unless deemed necessary for courtroom security. Currently all juvenile offenders transferred from detention centers appear in court in restraints. Child advocates say the practice damages children psychologically and affects their courtroom behavior. Another measure reviewed by the committee would allow juveniles to choose to continue court-ordered services through age 21. Another would allow juveniles who commit low-level offenses to receive in-home treatment. The committee took no action on the bills.

Beatrice hospital officials announce facility expansion

BEATRICE, Neb. (AP) — Officials with Beatrice Community Hospital and Health Center have announced plans for an expansion that's expected to cost \$7.2 million. The Beatrice Daily Sun reports that the 15-month construction project revealed on Wednesday will begin this spring, adding more than 17,000 square feet of space to the hospital. Hospital officials say the expansion allows for additional room for different departments, including the Women and Children's Clinic, the Infusion Center and the Rehabilitation Services unit. It will also renovate the Physician Clinic and reconfigure the parking to decrease the walking distance for patients. The hospital has selected Altus Architectural Studios of Omaha, Caspers Construction of Beatrice and Sampson Construction of Lincoln, to lead the project.

Michigan man dies after big rig runs off road in Nebraska

ALDA, Neb. (AP) — Authorities say a Michigan man died after the big rig he was driving ran across a county road and struck several objects as it left Interstate 80 in south-central Nebraska. The Hall County Sheriff's Department says the accident occurred around 6 p.m. Tuesday, just off the eastbound exit ramp at the South Alda Road interchange. The truck didn't halt at the bottom of the ramp. It ran across South Alda, striking a tree, a sign and a power pole before stopping. The driver was trapped in the wreckage, which soon was engulfed by flames. The Hall County Sheriff's Office identified the driver as 57-year-old Dennis Lambertson of Jackson, Michigan. The accident is being investigated.

Girl faces homicide charge in crash death of little sister

PAPILLION, Neb. (AP) — An 18-year-old from Plattsmouth faces a vehicular homicide charge for a collision that fatally injured her little sister last month. Sarpy County prosecutors said in a news release Wednesday that the driver was 17 when the accident occurred on January 13th. Prosecutors say she failed to yield the right of way when she tried to turn west onto Platteview Road off northbound U.S. Highway 75. Her sport utility vehicle was struck by a southbound minivan and then a car. The teenager's 7-year-old sister was in a right rear passenger seat of the SUV. The younger girl was taken to an Omaha hospital, and authorities say she died there on January 19th. The Associated Press is not using the sisters' names because the AP generally doesn't name juveniles accused of crimes.

Nebraska man who shot himself gets prison for gun

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A 28-year-old Lincoln man who accidentally shot himself has been given two to six years in prison. The Lincoln Journal Star reports that Kan Tap was sentenced on Tuesday. He'd been convicted of attempted possession of a firearm by a felon. He'd made a plea deal with prosecutors who lowered the charge. Prosecutors say Tap shot himself in his left leg on April 7th. He told Lincoln police several stories before admitting that he shot himself accidentally after picking up a gun on the floor of a car in which he was riding. Tap's attorney sought probation for Tap, saying Tap has endured a long recovery from his wound. But Judge John Colborn said he couldn't ignore Tap's criminal history or the fact that he'd lied to police.

Fremont schools plan to implement dual language program

FREMONT, Neb. (AP) — Fremont Public Schools has revealed plans to implement a dual language program for students in the district. Brad Dahl, executive director of student services and business affairs for the district, on Wednesday said that a steady increase of English-language learners prompted the Fremont Board of Education's decision to launch the program. It is slated to begin in the 2015 to 2016 school year with anywhere from 20 to 50 kindergarten students. The Fremont Tribune reports about 8 percent of students in the district receive English-language learner support, compared to the state average of 5.96 percent. Dahl says the district determined that those receiving support were not performing at the same level as their peers. Dahl says the program will expand one grade level each year.

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