

Wiggins case may be ready for trial in late January

Shevin Wiggins appeared in court on Thursday morning to determine when his case was ready to go to trial. Terry Dougherty, Wiggins' attorney, said the former Husker starting receiver's case was not ready for the first jury term beginning Jan. 10 but hoped the case would be ready for the second two-week term starting Jan. 24. Wiggins is accused of committing sexual assault on a 14-year-old girl July 25 or 26. The former football player pleaded not guilty Aug. 22.

East Union burglarized

The Nebraska East Union was burglarized in the early morning hours of Dec. 26. The report was received by University Police at 1:06 p.m. that day. The intruders entered through a window on the north side of the building sometime between 3:03 a.m., the last time the community service officer checked the building, and 1:06 p.m., when the report was made. The burglars stole a total of \$556 in merchandise from the bookstore, including a \$40 hooded sweatshirt, an \$80 coat, \$342 worth of U.S. postage stamps, two disposable cameras, two Mariah Carey compact discs, a surge protector and a roll of film, said University Police Sgt. Mylo Bushing. There were also \$1,600 in damages from broken windows in the bakery and bowling alley and a damaged ATM machine, from which no money was missing. The bookstore's safe was found tipped on its side but unopened. There also appeared to be no entry or attempt at entry into the bookstore's cash registers, according to University Police reports. A university bowling coach inspected the area and found no damage other than the broken window to gain access into the alley, University Police reports said. Officers dusted for fingerprints but

LAW AND ORDER

had no suspects at this time.

Toxic fumes cause employees to leave building

Toxic fumes from a floor sealant forced nearly 200 employees out of Centurion International, 3425 N. 44th St., on Wednesday morning. Fifty-two workers were sent to Lincoln hospitals. Two employees were admitted overnight and were released Thursday morning. The fumes were caused by outside contractors who were sealing floors, said Gary Kuck, president of Centurion International. The contractors used ventilation, but it was "not good enough," Kuck said. About 50 employees returned to the building at 11 a.m. Wednesday morning. As of Friday morning all but six employees returned back to work, and all were out of the hospital, Kuck said. Everyone who was treated on Wednesday will be going back for a checkup Friday, Kuck said. The response of the fire department and police officers was remarkably fast, Kuck said.

Bomb threat causes evacuation of two UNL buildings

Both Oldfather Hall and the Military and Naval Science building were evacuated Thursday afternoon after a bomb threat was reported to a local television station. University Police refused to release the name of the station. The 1:36 p.m. call informed the station that there were two explosive devices located in each hall, said Bill Moody, Lincoln chief fire inspector. University Police received a call through the 911 center at 1:40 p.m. and responded to the call. The bomb squad and Lincoln police searched the buildings for about an hour but did not find any explosive devices. The full-time staff working in the buildings were asked to check personal

areas and report anything that looked unusual.

About an hour and 15 minutes after the call came into the station, the buildings were reopened.

Murder suspect waives right to preliminary hearing

Russell W. Harms waived his right to a preliminary hearing Thursday in a Nemaha County Court. Harms is charged with first-degree murder and use of a weapon to commit a felony in the Dec. 10 shooting death of Tennyson Kelsay, 84, of Stella. County Judge Curtis Maschman set Harms' arraignment for Jan. 26 in Nemaha County District Court. Kelsay was the grandfather of former Nebraska football player Chad Kelsay, now playing for the Pittsburgh Steelers, and current Husker football rush end, Chris Kelsay.

Task force meets to review prison inmate medical care

A five-member task force appointed by Gov. Mike Johanns last month to review medical care for prison inmates had its first meeting Friday. The task force came after a report from the State Ombudsman's Office said the medical care for inmates was filled with inept staff and supplies and a lack of care for patients. It will be reporting on the medical facilities in Lincoln, Omaha, York and Hastings. During Friday's meeting, the task force asked prison officials for the credentials needed for medical staff, the protocols for treating illnesses and injuries, the amount workers in the prison system earn, if prison officials or the medical staff have a final say in what kind of treatment, if any, is given and the budget and appropriation of money for treatment of inmates. The next meeting is scheduled for Feb. 11.

Compiled by staff writer Michelle Starr

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LEGISLATURE

Legislature begins discussions

Property tax relief and the state's execution method are hot topics.

By Veronica Daehn
Staff writer

The 96th Legislature began Wednesday, and senators are mulling over what they consider to be the most important issues. Sen. DiAnna Schimek of Lincoln said property taxes are a "huge issue" this session. "We might not accomplish anything, but discussion will get started," Schimek said. There are three major property tax proposals, Sarpy County Sen. Jon Bruning said. Right now, owners of agricultural land pay 80 percent of the land's value in taxes. One proposal would make it so that owners would pay 70 percent of the land's value, instead of 80. Another proposal would, over a period of 10 years, drop the amount land-owners pay in taxes to 50 percent of the land's value. The final proposal would tax agricultural land based on the income it produces instead of on its value. "Taxes are always a concern, and the state is over-reliant on property tax now," Bruning said. "We need to cut the size of the government by cutting reliance on property taxes." The state collects income and sales tax, while property taxes go directly to local governments, Bruning said. Local government officials largely use that tax money to pay for the public school system.

By cutting property taxes, local governments would receive less money. In order to continue to support public education then, the state would need to provide more state aid, or the local government would need to cut spending. Bruning said he supports both of those options in order to reduce property taxes. Sen. Merton Dierks of Ewing said the state should eliminate property taxes all together. But, he doesn't think that's very "do-able." Instead, he said, he supports the proposal that would reduce property taxes to 50 percent over 10 years. Other senators, like Schimek, said they don't know what the solution should be. But Schimek said she is willing to look at any plan that would make the entire tax system more fair. Changing the method of execution in Nebraska is another hot topic among senators. Nebraska is one of only three states that still uses the electric chair, Bruning said. If LB52 passes, the state will switch to lethal injection. "Some of us grudgingly support (the death penalty) as a deterrent," Bruning said. "But, there is no reason for us to be any more brutal than we have to be." "I'd like to see (the method of execution) change, and I'm willing to take the time to do it this session." Sen. Pam Brown of Omaha said she is focusing on child care. There are two bills focusing on the issue, she said. One would change the way child care is financed in Nebraska, and one would change the way child care providers are trained.

Another issue important to Brown is the consolidation of local governments. Voters passed an amendment to the state Constitution in the last election that allows local governments — for example, Lincoln and Lancaster County — to consolidate. But Brown said the Legislature needs to create a mechanism that would make the structure of those governments consistent. Lincoln Sen. Chris Beutler said there is a "broad array" of topics important to him. For one, he said he would like to see the government become more efficient. LB414 would make the clerk of the district court a non-elected position. Because clerks don't make policy decisions, they would be appointed by a judge. This bill would allow for the consolidation of the clerk positions of the county and district court's office, Beutler said, thereby making the government more efficient. He said he would also like to look at increasing health insurance for university employees. "We need to see if we can do better there," he said. Bruning said he also wants to help at-risk children. LB1083 would provide funds for mentoring programs and would give state employees the chance to volunteer one day a year. The bill would also give anyone certified as a volunteer the opportunity to mentor one hour a week. While the session's pace is still fairly slow, Bruning said he is eager to see what it has to offer. "I'm pretty excited about all of these things right now," he said.

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