



Watertown PUBLIC OPINION

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Decision may cause utility hike

BY JEREMY FUGLEBERG
Public Opinion Staff Writer

An unpublicized decision by a city committee Friday could lead to a big jump in what Watertown residents and businesses pay for utilities, said Watertown's top utilities official.

Geoff Heig, general manager of Watertown Municipal Utilities, isn't happy he wasn't told of the finance committee meeting, which he said he only

found out about after the fact. Among other things, the committee recommended a major increase in what the Municipal Utilities pitches into the city's general fund every year.

"We have no idea why this was done without us," said Heig. He said the discussions that decide the yearly payments are usually a friendly negotiation. The late meeting Friday, he says, shows that's no longer the case.

"They're not negotiating anymore," he said. "It came out of nowhere."

Not so, said Stanton Fox, the city's attorney, who also serves as the utilities board's lawyer. The committee's move was only a recommendation, he said, and a final decision won't be made until the council's budget hearing Aug. 21.

In the meantime, after hearing of the concerns, Fox said Mayor

Paul Fox wants to meet with the utility board to discuss the committee's decision.

"The mayor's expectation is that he will have an opportunity (to) have a conversation and reach across to the public utility board," he said.

Paul Fox said a meeting time hasn't been set yet.

Heig said the decision shows the city isn't treating the utility board as the independent body

it was created to be more than 40 years ago, when it was split off from the day-to-day politics of city hall.

"It's a power play for who controls the city," he said. "That's what I would've told them if I was there (at the Friday meeting)."

The city finance committee, made up of five city council members, decided to recommend **Please see UTILITY, Page 10A**

Clearing
Low tonight: 62
High Wednesday: 84
Tomorrow's forecast on Page 2A

Inside Neighbors

Codington County 4-H Achievement Days purple ribbon winners. **Page 8A**

Amateur Baseball

Larchwood ends Bryant's season. **Page 1B**

Arrow Golf

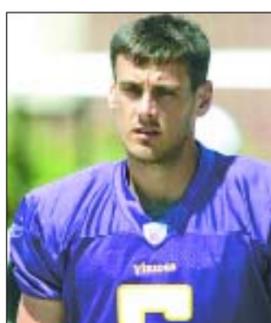
Boys open season with seventh-place finish at Washington. **Page 1B**



Sexson's walk-off sends Twins to fifth straight loss. **Page 1B**



Allure of big time captures the fancy of D-II schools. **Page 1B**



Vikings counting on more consistent punting. **Page 1B**

Shuttle trouble...

HOUSTON (AP) — NASA experts were evaluating Tuesday whether astronauts should venture into the void of space to fix a deep gash on the shuttle Endeavour's belly before the crew returns home. **See complete story...10B**

Calendar

Tonight

■ The Watertown Park and Recreation Department is hosting an informational meeting for the proposed bike/recreational trail on North Lake Drive from Cutts Avenue to Memorial Park from 7 to 9 p.m. in the Community Room of the Watertown Regional Library.

Index

- Annie's Mailbox8B
- Business9A
- Classified5-7B
- Crossword puzzle8B
- Editorial6A
- Comics8B
- Lottery2A
- Matter of record5A
- Neighbors8A
- Obituaries9B
- Sports1-4B
- Weather2A

Recycling this week: **Paper**



Justin Stanley performs maintenance on a street light on Fourth Avenue in Watertown Monday afternoon. Stanley is an apprentice lineman with Watertown Municipal Utilities and spent the afternoon performing routine maintenance on street lights throughout the city.

Public Opinion Photo by Michelle Sührer

LATI making long term facility plans

BY WAYNE HAMMOND
Public Opinion News Editor

Lake Area Technical Institute is putting long-term planning at the forefront of its agenda.

Monday night the Watertown School Board heard that later this month the school will interview architectural firms in the hopes of finding one to help plan the next two decades of facility needs at the school. The board previously had approved soliciting potential firms.

LATI President Deb Shephard told the board Monday that two firms responded and that a meeting will take place Aug. 28 between the firms and the district's property committee (which includes a pair of board members) as well as LATI personnel.

Shephard said the goal is to have a firm selected to have a campus-wide facility plan in place by December.

Supt. Lesli Hanson said that the planning enables the district to look at its future.

"We know that (campus) is going to be with us," Hanson said, adding that it is wise to have a campus-wide plan of what the school really does and does not need, 'not just adding buildings and knocking down walls.'

Monday also included board approval of a LATI project of more immediacy — a \$165,320 project to add a pair of classrooms in an existing shop area of the LATI main building. The board approved the low bid from Dallas Hanson, Inc. of Ortonville, Minn. to handle the project. The new rooms will serve both the dental assisting program as well as general classroom needs for the school.

Shephard said the project meets an immediate need and was planned for in the school's budget process.

Following approval, board president Susan Jones said she believed that this project was needed for the time being. She added that the long-range facility planning talked about earlier in the meeting could save 'instead of constantly having piece work' in the future.

In other business Monday the board:

■ Approved the resignations of Jean Harmdierks, Jefferson part-time custodian; Kim Lehner, business office general assistant; Colliene **Please see PLANS, Page 10A**

Task force begins search for tech funding

BY BOB MERCER
Public Opinion Capitol Bureau

Members of a legislative task force learned Monday that South Dakota doesn't have a formula for determining the amounts of state aid to the four public technical institutes and there is no system in place to pay for major repairs of campus buildings.

The technical institutes at Mitchell, Watertown, Rapid City and Sioux Falls are independently managed by the local

school boards, but local property taxes aren't used for the operation. The school districts instead rely on a mixture of tuition and fees, private donations and state funding which is set annually by the Legislature and governor as part of the state budget process.

Meanwhile ownership of campus buildings and land varies. State government holds the deeds on projects which have been financed through state-issued bonds, while buildings

which were funded solely through local money are owned by the school districts.

"We have a mish-mash of who owns what and who paid," Sen. Ed Olson, R-Mitchell, said.

The task force was created by the Legislature last winter to study the issue of technical institute funding. The 18 members, a variety of lawmakers, business leaders and the four campus presidents, are meeting as a

group for the first time this week.

They spent Monday at Lake Area Technical Institute in Watertown and gather this morning (Tuesday) at Southeast Technical Institute in Sioux Falls, then move to Mitchell Technical Institute this afternoon.

The panel is scheduled to meet again Sept. 5 in Rapid City at Western Dakota Technical Institute. **Please see TECH, Page 10A**

Judge rules contributor to abortion ban fight can remain anonymous

BY JOE KAFKA
Associated Press Writer

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A circuit judge ruled Monday that state Rep. Roger Hunt, R-Brandon, does not have to disclose a \$750,000 contributor to a failed election effort to ban most abortions in South Dakota.

State officials filed a lawsuit against Hunt earlier this year in an effort to force him to identify the anonymous donor.

But Circuit Judge Kathleen Caldwell has ruled in Hunt's favor and dismissed the case.

The ballot measure to end most abortions failed by a vote

of 56 percent to 44 percent. Lawmakers had approved the proposal, but it was put on hold when opponents gathered enough signatures to put the issue on the ballot.

Hunt set up a corporation last September called Promising Future that gave the money to VoteYesForLife.com, a group supporting the abortion ban. The



Hunt

lawmaker, a staunch abortion foe, said the person who gave the money is a South Dakota resident and wants to remain anonymous out of fear of possible violence.

Secretary of State Chris Nelson argued that Promising Future was a ballot question committee that was required under state law to disclose the source of its money.

Nelson said Monday he would discuss the possibility of an appeal with Attorney General Larry Long.

"I'm surprised," Nelson said after hearing of the decision. **Please see DONOR, Page 10A**

Caldwell said Hunt and the corporation he set up to make the donations, which were done in \$250,000 increments, are not a ballot question committee and need not disclose the identity of the donor.

"Giving a contribution does not make a corporation a ballot question committee," the judge wrote.

Hunt, who is a lawyer, said he feels vindicated. The anonymous donation was legal under laws that were in effect at the time, he said.

Chinese developments changing presidential race

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Democratic presidential contender Barack Obama said in a recent debate that "the center of gravity in this world is shifting to Asia," he had one nation clearly in mind.

"China is rising and it's not going away," said the senator from Illinois. "They're neither our enemy nor our friend. They're competitors."

More than a year before the

2008 election, China — occasionally as partner, more often as adversary and potential vote-getter — is also rising as an issue among the candidates for president.

Iraq is, and will be, the top foreign policy issue among the people jockeying for the White House. But as detractors increasingly shine a critical spotlight on China in the buildup to the 2008 Summer Olympics in

Beijing, the contenders will likely ratchet up their rhetoric on China's ability to help and to hinder American interests around the world.

"It's impossible to avoid China as a policy issue," Doug Holtz-Eakin, a policy adviser to the campaign of Republican Sen. John McCain, said in an interview. "Anybody who is interested in being the next president of the United States has to think con-

sciously about how ... to have China emerge as a responsible stakeholder."

Candidates have been raising, in debates and campaign stops, what they see as China's failure to live up to its duties as an emerging global superpower.

But they also recognize that the U.S. needs China, a veto-wielding member of the U.N. Security Council, to secure punishment for Iran's nuclear pro-

gram and to persuade North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons.

"If I'm lucky enough to be president, making China a partner for stability in the world will be one of my highest priorities. China is really key, in many respects, as they become a very large economy," Republican Mitt Romney, the former governor of Massachusetts, said. **Please see CHINA, Page 10A**

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UTILITY

Continued from Front Page

a 25 percent increase in what the municipal utilities will pay the city in 2008. That amount — which would now be tied to the utilities' revenue if the recommendation is approved by the full city council — will go up by a half percentage point of revenue each year from 2009 to 2013. The percentage would top off at 5.25 percent beginning in 2014. Heig estimates that by that date the utilities would pay more than \$4 million to the city's general fund every year. Last year the utility's paid \$845,000 to the city's general fund. The recommendations will now go before the city council at its budget hearing Aug. 21.

Heig said if the city decided to raise the amount the utility must pay, it would mean a double-digit increase in the city's low utility rates for residents and businesses and could jeopardize the \$150,000 the board makes by selling energy to the ethanol plant.

The city's low utility rates are a "tool to attract industry here," said Heig. "The city is shooting itself in the foot here."

Shelly Ebbers, assistant finance officer for the city, said the amount the utility pays hasn't changed for many years. And a leaner city budget means mon-

ey has to be found somewhere. "Costs continue to rise, sales tax dollars are not increasing as much as they were in the past," she said. "So instead of continuing to cut budgets or raise property taxes — which nobody wants to see — you do what you can do make up the shortfall."

Council president Gordon Garnos, who also heads the finance committee, said he's not surprised the utility board would be upset at the proposed changes.

"If I was on the utility board, it would bother me. At the same time, I see the mayor's point of view, of the city trying to meet its budget," he said. "Should it pay

some form of revenue to the city in lieu of taxes? It's a good question. The utility board has a major responsibility, but so does the city. We need to work together the best we can."

Tracy Turbak, the city's top finance officer, brought the suggested changes before the finance committee. He's on vacation and unavailable until Aug. 20. Ebbers said. She said Turbak took minutes at the committee meeting and will have them upon his return. Besides Garnos, other members are council members Jon Solum, Carol Arbogast, Pat Walder and Russ Wilkins.

PLANS

Continued from Front Page

McNaboe, WHS food service worker; Teresa Milliron, part-time SuccessMaker aide at Jefferson; Paul Peterson, WHS social studies instructor; Sherry Swanson, Jefferson special education aide; and Margo Spiering, Mellette special education aide.

Approved Don Roby as a director of the Arrow Education Foundation Board. Roby, the board's 13th member, will serve a three-year term.

Recognized Hanson, who recently was awarded the state's Curriculum Leadership Award from the School Administrators of South Dakota. Also recognized former Arrow football coach and current district athletic director Doug Schooley, a recent honoree as a member of the South Dakota Football Coaches Association Hall of Fame.

Heard a report of the first year of the WHS Freshman

Academy from new WHS principal Mike Butts and assistant Brad Heesch. Butts said he was excited by the opportunity of coming into a school with an academy in place and went on to present the board with an update including attendance, disciplinary and academic performance statistics from the inaugural 2006-07 year. Conclusions drawn included that there was an overall improvement in attendance (the percentage of students skipping class, truant and unexcused from school ranged from 2.9 to 4.8 percent in 2006-07 quarters as compared to 8.8 to 20.5 percent in 2005-06 quarters) and behavior, with disciplinary infractions decreasing in proportion to the size of the class in 2006-07 compared to the year before. Also improved were first semester failure rates, however second semester failure rates were up.

Heard an update on progress being made at McKinley School. Architect Dave Todd said that the old portion of the school came down pretty well, but took a little longer than anticipated. He said progress is 'very close' to the schedule laid out in the bid documents. He said the connecting corridor between the new classrooms and the existing building is pretty much in place and that it should be ready for the start of class on Aug. 23. Also addressing the board was McKinley principal Darrell Stacey and district facilities manager Don Stormo. Stacey said he and his staff are just waiting for some finishing touches, that the corridor is ahead of schedule, and that overall 'everything is looking good.'

Approved the creation of a new board committee, a policy committee. Jones said the committee will meet monthly and will

include two board members, Mark Kludt and Fred Deutsch, Watertown Education Association representation as well as district administrators. The concept is to review the board policies that govern the school district. The committee will meet monthly starting in September. Hanson said it has been over six years since a full policy review and the new committee is intended to be an ongoing review of the district's 200-plus policies.

Approved fund raising activities planned for various schools for the upcoming year, as well as approving the 2007-08 swimming pool agreement with the City of Watertown and approving a contract with a provider for physical therapy services.

The board's regular meeting was preceded by an executive session to discuss a board contract.

TECH

Continued from Front Page

"It's not this task force's job to find the money. It's this task force's job to look at the problem," Rep. Jeff Haverly, R-Rapid City, said. He sponsored the task force legislation and is serving as the panel's chairman.

Haverly said there has been a change of approach in technical-school funding since Gov. Mike Rounds took office in 2003.

Haverly said Rounds favors giving the tech schools a standard inflationary increase and has largely discontinued the practice under previous Gov. Bill Janklow of making substantial grants to the schools from a state economic development fund.

Gary Williams, the retired president of Lake Area, said the practice of granting \$2 million annually to the schools for purchasing equipment to stay cur-

rent with employers began under former Gov. George S. Mickelson nearly 20 years ago and was continued by Janklow.

Williams said the problem is that such funding was discretionary. "There's never been a funding formula ever," he said. "It's just been who the administration is, who the secretary of education is, who his advisers are."

The four campuses currently split about \$19.2 million in state funding. The money is spread among through a distribution formula set in state law, with student enrollment as the main factor.

State funding hasn't kept up with enrollment growth, according to statistics presented by Western Dakota president Rich Gross. He said enrollment rose

15 percent from 1997 through 2004 while state funding per student edged up 4 percent.

Haverly asked the task force members Monday to focus on funding rather than who should be in control of the technical institutes. Rounds vetoed legislation passed in the 2007 session that would have created a new state board.

Currently the state Board of Education, whose members are appointed by the governor, has broad oversight of the schools on tuition, fees and new programs, while the local school boards have daily management control.

The state Board of Regents, whose members govern the public universities, have threatened to take the issue of control of technical schools to court, citing

a provision in the state constitution that regents contend should give their board oversight.

The unusual system of dual-management can be traced to the original 1965 legislation authorizing local school districts to create what then were known as vocational technical schools. Land and buildings had to be locally donated.

Within a year Watertown followed by Rapid City and Sturgis had created schools, followed by Mitchell and Sioux Falls in 1968, according to Lake Area president Deb Shephard. The Sturgis and Rapid City operations combined in 1978.

"You're in the worst of both worlds," Rep. Quinten Burg, D-Wessington Springs, said. "You don't have your own, yet you're really not part of the other."

DONOR

Continued from Front Page

"Last year we were operating under a certain set of rules, and those rules have now been repealed," Hunt said. "I didn't have any problem repealing the rules, but I feel that I had every right to operate under whatever

the current law was and that's what I was doing in 2006."

Even if Promising Future was formed with the motive of protecting the identity of the anonymous donor, that does not mean its conduct violated state cam-

paign finance laws on the books at the time, Caldwell said in her decision. A corporation may contribute to ballot question committees, she said.

"The ballot committee, in this case VoteYesForLife, disclosed

the corporate contributor in its finance report," Caldwell said. "However, the corporation making the contribution was not required to disclose every shareholder of the corporation under the laws in place in 2006."

CHINA

Continued from Front Page

Many of the comments, however, have been complaints, as candidates work to connect with voters increasingly worried about China's huge military buildup, its flood of goods into the U.S., its ability to influence violence in Sudan's Darfur region, its repression of minorities, dissidents and journalists.

Michael Green, President Bush's former chief adviser on Asia, said that regardless of any harsh words candidates direct toward China, the next president will likely embrace the same measured U.S. policies endorsed by past administrations.

Bashing China might win votes, the reasoning goes, but

newly elected presidents soon realize that a more careful tone is needed to deal with the complex U.S.-China relationship.

Still, as the 2008 campaign heats up, criticism has outweighed calls for engagement.

A recurring theme has been that China must do more to use its oil-buying leverage with Sudan to end rape and murder in Darfur.

In a June debate, Democrat Bill Richardson, the governor of New Mexico, suggested that if China does not put more pressure on Sudan, "we say to them, maybe we won't go to the Olympics."

Attention has also been given to Beijing's economic policies

and the U.S. trade deficit with China — \$232.5 billion last year and expected to grow.

At a debate this month, Obama said of China: "We've got to have a president in the White House who's negotiating to make sure that we're looking after American workers. That means enforcing our trade agreements. It means that if they're manipulating their currency, that we take them to the mat on this issue."

American manufacturers contend the Chinese currency is undervalued by as much as 40 percent, giving China a tremendous competitive advantage against U.S. products.

Democratic Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton received applause at a debate by raising reports of faulty or tainted Chinese goods that have been shipped to the United States and other countries. It was under Clinton's husband, former President Clinton, that the U.S. normalized trade relations with China.

"We have to have tougher standards on what they import into this country," Clinton said. "I do not want to eat bad food from China or have my children having toys that are going to get them sick."

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