

KNOX County News

BLOOMFIELD MONITOR *The* Creighton News *Wausa Gazette*

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Leasing kitchen heats up council meeting

By CARRIE PITZER
PUBLISHER

The City of Creighton is considering leasing the kitchen area of the community center and inn to be leased.

Following a 45-minute discussion on that agenda item during Tuesday's special meeting, the City Council agreed to advertise the kitchen area as available for lease. Proposals are due to the City by 4 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 11. Full details for proposals are listed in the ad within this week's issue of the Knox County News, as requested by the City Council.

Thirty-seven people attended Tuesday's meeting, which had two agenda items — an application for a new City employee, which was unanimously approved; and leasing the kitchen space of the community center to Ronda Hurtig, who operates a frozen pizza business in Creighton.

Hurtig said she has vendors in 15 communities and a request from an

Iowa grocery store to start carrying her product.

Mayor Steve Morrill said Hurtig approached him last month about potentially leasing the kitchen area to prepare her pizzas.

The City purchased the former restaurant and motel at 408 Rice St. in 2022, and Morrill said this was the first time anyone had inquired about leasing the kitchen. While the City has regularly advertised the entire facility for lease, Morrill said he didn't believe they had advertised the kitchen area individually, which he said was a credit to Hurtig for having the initiative to inquire about it.

At that point, Council members — as well as the public — could not agree whether it was initiative, entrepreneurialism or even fair — all words they used in their arguments on whether they supported leasing the facility to Hurtig.

— See **KITCHEN**, page 11



More than three dozen people attended Tuesday night's special meeting with the Creighton City Council. There were two agenda items — hiring a new City employee and leasing the kitchen area of the community center and inn.

WAUSA

Daddy/Daughter dance

The Wausa Youth Group is presenting a Daddy/Daughter Dance on February 8, 2025 at the Wausa City Auditorium from 6 a.m. - 9 p.m.

BLOOMFIELD

Blood drive planned

The Bloomfield community blood drive will be March 3 from 12:30 p.m. to 6 p.m., at Bloomfield Community Center.

CREIGHTON

Comedy show planned

The Creighton Chamber of Commerce will host a comedy show fundraiser featuring David Harris and Ben Marcolle on Saturday, March 22, at the Community Center. Social hour is from 6-7 p.m., with the show from 7-8:30 p.m. Single tickets are \$35, double are \$60 or \$225 for a table of eight.

CROFTON

Leadership class

Leadership Knox County Class IX Graduation Celebration will be held at the Crofton Haymarket in Crofton on Monday, Feb. 3, at 7:30 p.m.

Blood drive planned

The Crofton community blood drive will be March 11 from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m., at Crofton Auditorium.

NIOBRARA

Customer service

Register to learn Customer Service Excellence. A training will be held at the Niobrara Fire Hall on Friday, Feb. 7, at 7 - 8:30 or 9 a.m.

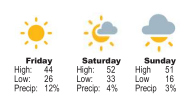
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- City of Bloomfield
- Lewis & Clark NRD
- Bloomfield School
- Creighton School
- Knox County Zoning
- Upper Elkhorn NRD

Look For Legals on Pages 2, 3
This newspaper is a legal publication for Knox County, City/Villages of Bloomfield, Creighton & Wausa; Bloomfield, Creighton & Wausa Schools, Lewis & Clark NRD, NCCPD, State of Nebraska and others.

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Retired Creighton wrestling coaches Randy Kliment and Tim Nielsen present Rick Hasenpflug with a plaque, recognizing the 1997 graduate and state champion in honor of his SWCA Hall of Fame induction.

State champion honored for selection into hall of fame

By CARRIE PITZER
PUBLISHER

Rick Hasenpflug placed his hand across his chest, trying to stay composed. It had been 28 years since he stood on a wrestling mat in the Creighton gymnasium.

The last time was at practice just before leaving for the Class D state wrestling tournament in February 1997. When the 160-pounder returned to Creighton a few days later, he came home a state champion after one of the most memorable rallies in school history. It was so remarkable the 1997 graduate will be inducted into the NSWCA Hall of Fame this summer. Creighton chose Thursday's final home triangular of the season to honor Hasenpflug.

"It's very emotional being here — very moving," the 46-year-old said. "This community meant a lot to me growing up. There are a lot of people here tonight who have been going to these events 40-

— See **CHAMPION**, page 11



Emergency meetings called for courthouse

By CARRIE PITZER
PUBLISHER

Knox County Supervisors held two emergency meetings in three days last week to discuss security at the courthouse. Supervisors said there is no imminent danger to the public or our employees.

The Jan. 27 emergency meeting was held due to Knox County Courthouse security issues with no action taken following an hour and a half closed session. Just days later on Jan. 30, they held an additional meeting on the same topic but made a decision following an hour-long executive session.

On Thursday morning, the Supervisors went into closed session at 8:35 a.m. and came out and closed at 9:36 a.m. Upon their exit, the Supervisors voted on and approved hiring an independent entity to investigate Courthouse security.

The motion was made by Kevin Mlady of District 2 and seconded by Marty O'Connor of District 1. It passed 7-0.

The Supervisors told the Knox County News at the meeting that they could not comment on the situation. They did release a statement later that morning.

"Investigation into Courthouse security is to be led by an independent entity with no imminent danger to the public or our employees," the statement read.

4-H days planned

Every year, Nebraska 4-H Month brings thousands of young people, parents, volunteers, and alumni together to celebrate all the ways in which 4-H helps youth find a place where they belong. Across the state, Nebraska 4-H invites community members to celebrate:

- 4-H Spirit Day on Thursday, Feb. 6
- 4-H Volunteer Appreciation Day on Thursday, Feb. 13
- 4-H Supporters and Donors Appreciation Day on Thursday, Feb. 20

— See **4-H**, page 2

NOW HIRING BUSINESS MANAGER

DUE TO PENDING RETIREMENT, BLOOMFIELD COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IS TAKING IMMEDIATE APPLICATIONS FOR A BUSINESS MANAGER.

Job details are available on the NDE Teach in NE website at: <https://www.nebraskaeducationjobs.ne.gov/jobs/bloomfield-community-schools/business-manager-17/>

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KNOX COUNTY NEWS

The BLOOMFIELD MONITOR Creighton News Wausa Gazette

Thursday, August 21, 2025

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KNOX COUNTY

Rural water

West Knox Rural Water System is in the process of upgrading all existing water meters with new, technologically advanced meters. Contact West Knox Rural Water at 402-668-7223 with any questions.

Courthouse closed

The Knox County Courthouse will be closed on Sept. 1 due to the Labor Day holiday.

No driver's licenses

There will be no driver's license exams in Center, Hartington, Neligh and O'Neill Sept. 8 through Oct. 3.

WAUSA

Labor Day celebration

The Wausa Labor Day Celebration is on Friday, Aug. 29 through Aug. 31. Look for the entire schedule on Page 10.

Alumni reunion set

The Wausa High School Alumni will be holding their Alumni Reunion on Saturday, August 30. The evening will begin at 5:30-8:30 p.m. Social Hour, 6:30-9 p.m. the banquet and 9 p.m. to midnight music.

CREIGHTON

Blood drive set

The Bloomfield Community Center will be holding its Area Blood Drive on Tuesday, Sept. 2, from 12:30 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Hunter safety class

Hunter safety classes will be offered in Creighton at 1408 Lake Street on Sept. 8-10 from 9 p.m. to 9 p.m. Registration is open through the Nebraska Game and Parks Hunt Education website.

VERDIGRE

Blood drive set

The American Red Cross will be having a blood drive on Wednesday, Sept. 17 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., at Verdigre Public School in the gym.

LEGAL NOTICES

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Look For Legals on Pages 3, 8, 10
This newspaper is a legal publication for Knox County, City/Villages of Bloomfield, Creighton & Wausa; Bloomfield, Creighton & Wausa Schools; Lewis & Clark NRD; NCRPD, State of Nebraska and others.

WEATHER

Friday	Saturday	Sunday
High: 86 Low: 59 Precip: 14%	High: 70 Low: 60 Precip: 24%	High: 73 Low: 59 Precip: 38%

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'NOT AN EASY DAY'



PHOTO BY CARRIE PITZER

Knox County Supervisors Chairman James Sokol reads a statement announcing the firing of two employees, the suspension of another and the elimination of a position. This came after a five-month investigation to courthouse security.

Attorney suspended; two fired after investigation

By CARRIE PITZER
PUBLISHER

Dan Henery and Heather Kienow met with Knox County Supervisors for just three minutes.

The duo was then escorted out of the boardroom as the words "get boxes" were mumbled while they made their way to the courthouse basement.

But the Chief Deputy and 911 Coordinator weren't the only Knox County employees on the chopping block. County Attorney Hanna Knox Jensen was suspended for one year without pay, and Deputy Attorney John Thomas had his position eliminated.

The report — which the Knox County Attorney's Office said stemmed from a "secret, five-month investigation" — has been forwarded to the Council for Discipline, who will determine the fate of their law licenses.

All four individuals were interviewed, named and scrutinized in a 41-page report regarding breaches of privacy at the Knox County Courthouse.

The issues stemmed from a kill switch not being installed or used after camera and audio equipment upgrades. That allowed others to hear private conversations during closed meetings of Supervisors, as well as personal meetings

involving employees. One such meeting, believed to have been overheard, involved counseling an employee who was considering suicide.

The report was prepared by David Begley and Eric Hagen, who served as special and deputy Knox County Attorney, respectively, due to conflicts within the county. They recommended the disciplinary action taken by supervisors and forwarded their conclusions to the Council for Discipline regarding both Knox County attorneys.

"It will be up to him to decide how to proceed regarding Mrs. Jensen's and Mr. Thomas's licenses to practice law," Begley wrote in the report. "I'm mindful that Mr. Thomas is 74 or 75 years old, but he is still admitted to practice law in Nebraska and may continue to do so."

Jensen has been practicing law for three years and became county attorney at the beginning of 2025.

Aftermath

The county attorney, chief deputy and 911 coordinator were all called dishonest in the report. The deputy county attorney gave answers Begley said were not credible. Those findings — released exactly seven months to the day after an

— See **INVESTIGATION**, page 13

TIMELINE

Oct. 23, 2023
Deputy County Attorney Hannah Jensen approved Applied Connective's quote of \$75,099.77 to upgrade courthouse cameras and audio, including the toggle switch to kill audio.

May 29, 2024
Applied Connective's installation was complete and billed in two segments.

January 22, 2025
Two incidents informing board that there was no kill switch. First was on raises for the Sheriff's staff and second was when Clerk Fischer was counseling an employee on personal health and HIPAA issues.

January 23, 2025
Chief Deputy Dan Henery, Rhonda Surface and Joann Fischer met. Henery admitted he could "hear everything up in the boardroom." Sheriff Don Henery told Fischer he "will take care of that." It was later determined that 911 Coordinator Heather Kienow was the admin user that viewed video from 8:54 a.m. to 9:29 a.m.

January 24, 2025
Fischer contacted Supervisor Marty O'Connor about the incident.

January 27, 2025
Board of Supervisors held an emergency meeting.

Chairman James Sokol and O'Connor removed what they believed to be the only microphone in the boardroom. Sheriff Henery and 911 Coordinator Heather Kienow attended the closed meeting, and the Sheriff demonstrated how conversations could still be heard even without that microphone. Further investigation showed there was a second microphone connected to a camera in the corner. Sokol removed and disconnected the listening device. The Sheriff freely admitted that the device was a microphone and it had been in place for over

— See **TIMELINE**, page 13



Chris Carlson

Carlson promoted to VP of agronomy

Central Valley Ag (CVA) recently announced Chris Carlson as the Senior Vice President of Agronomy.

With over two decades of experience at CVA and deep roots in agriculture, Carlson brings his dedication of leadership, innovation, and a lifelong commitment to serving growers.

A native of Wausa, Carlson grew up on a diversified farm operation, gaining firsthand experience in both row crops and feedlot management.

After earning an associate degree from Northeast Community College, he transferred to Wayne State College, where he completed a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Business in 1998. He is currently pursuing a teaching certificate to further his leadership in the agricultural industry.

Carlson began his career with CVA in 2000 as the location manager in Bloomfield. His passion for agriculture and dedication to delivering solutions for growers made him a key asset to the organization.

After 15 years at Bloomfield, he was promoted to Regional Sales Manager in 2015, and became Director of Sales in 2016. Now, as Senior Vice President of Agronomy, he continues to foster the culture of CVA with the same commitment that has defined his career.

"Being a part of CVA means being part of something bigger, it's a family," said Carlson. "I've always felt a calling to serve and support our growers, and I'm honored to continue that mission in this new role."

— See **AGRONOMY**, page 13

Moss sentenced in string of thefts

By CARRIE PITZER
PUBLISHER

Michael Moss didn't mince his words before being sentenced to 90 days in jail for a string of thefts in Creighton last year. "Lay down with dogs, you get up with fleas," Moss told Knox County District Judge James Kube.

Described as having high morals and character, Judge Kube said the charge "doesn't sound like you" and asked the 57-year-old from Winnetoon what led to the thefts.

"Piss-pour judgment, your honor. Lack of funds," he said.

Moss said due to back issues, he was unable to work and quickly blew through his savings. He said that's why he assisted Tyler Wood, 22 of Plainview, in the spree, saying it was Wood's idea.

"This isn't something I'm proud of. It's the first time I'm glad my parents are dead," he said. "There won't be family shame."

Originally charged with theft by unlawful taking, a Class IV felony, Moss was convicted of attempted theft by unlawful taking, a Class I misdemeanor. Wood was convicted in January in county court after entering a no contest plea. He was sentenced to 90 days in jail.

Due to that sentence, Moss — represented by appointed counsel Rod Smith — asked for a similar sentence. Knox County Deputy Attorney John Thomas said he didn't feel Moss was a candidate for probation considering he failed to appear in court twice.

Moss said he had been sick and slept through that appearance.

"The next day I could have called. Could have, should have but didn't," he told the judge.

According to court documents from Aug. 12, 2024, Creighton Police Chief Mark Duncan was first contacted by Chad Neuhaus of 508 Emerson St., saying he witnessed suspicious activity near his residence. Neuhaus told Duncan he saw a vehicle parked near the creek at about 2:30 a.m. The vehicle left within a few minutes. Neuhaus checked the area near the creek after returning from work later that day and saw items in the creek bed, including small engines, pressure washers, a generator, a two-inch water pump.

A photo taken of the site showed a tunnel through vegetation, leading into the woods along the creek, where more items were located, including water

— See **THEFTS**, page 13

Woman faces 50 years after Creighton raid

By CARRIE PITZER
PUBLISHER

Facing up to 50 years in prison to a camera in the corner, Sokol removed and disconnected the listening device. The Sheriff freely admitted that the device was a microphone and it had been in place for over

During court Tuesday, Judge James Kube adjusted Painter's bond requirement to allow her to have phone contact with Samuel Rosberg, who Knox County Deputy Attorney John Thomas said is "characterized as her boyfriend." Kube said she Painter will continue to have no contact with Paul Rosberg, Samuel's father.

Painter resides with her parents in Sioux City, and Judge Kube also allowed that to continue and for her to leave the state of Nebraska for residency.

— See **RAID**, page 13

NOTICE

West Knox Rural Water System is currently in the process of upgrading all existing water meters with new, technologically advanced meters that utilize cellular technology for remote readings. This project aims to enhance our water metering and management system leading to improved accuracy and improved leak detection. Remote readings eliminate the need for manual meter reading, and statements will be sent by mail after new meters are installed. After completion of all meters being installed, customers will have different payment options which include auto-withdrawal or credit card payments or continuing to pay by current method. Contact West Knox Rural Water at 402-668-7223 with any questions.

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Agronomy

- Continued From Page 1
Chris and his wife Nicole have been married for 23 years. They live on their family farm outside of Wausa with their two sons. Their oldest, Cashe, is a sophomore at Northeast Community College and currently completing a sales internship with CVA in Harrington. Their younger son,

Mac, is a junior in high school. "We're excited to have someone of Carlson's caliber leading our agronomy division," said Nic McCarthy, President/CEO of CVA. His passion for agriculture, deep community ties, and unwavering dedication to our cooperative values make him the right leader for this role."

Thefts

- Continued From Page 1
pumps, tarps, pruning shears, hand carts, ratchet straps and heater. Duncan also found a black hoodie and Under Armour shoes. Duncan called landowner Steve Keck, who said the items were not his, and Duncan had permission to conduct the investigation and look at video surveillance.

and his phone was collected as evidence. While reviewing video from the sale barn, court reports said a conversation was heard between Wood and Moss. The investigation confirmed the owners of the items found. Several other individuals were contacted about items and more contacted Duncan about items they were aware of being stolen.

Additional video was retrieved from the Creighton Livestock Market and pointed toward the Neuhaus home. Duncan said video showed a subject riding a bicycle west through Creighton toward the creek, as well as a dark-colored vehicle traveling toward Peabody Avenue. After receiving permission to set up cameras on the Creighton Livestock Market property, Duncan set up the camera and observed a male riding toward the creek on a bicycle. He stopped the male, who identified himself as Tyler Wood. Duncan said he could hear someone at the creek and detained Wood. With backup on scene, Duncan found another bicycle at the creek but did not locate anyone. Wood was arrested on a Madison County warrant

During sentencing, Judge Kube said he understood things happen in our lives that become tough, especially back issues, but that shouldn't be an excuse for his activities. "You have to realize you can't resort to criminal activity to make your life better," Judge Kube said. "All that does is make things worse for you and potential victims." Judge Kube said he considered probation, but knowing the financial issues Moss is facing, that wasn't the best option for him. "There's no reason to disbelieve you're a good person," he said. "What's really important is what you do after this. . . . You have to learn from your mistakes, and I'm sure you'll do that."

Raid

- Continued From Page 1
According to court documents, a federal search warrant was served June 3 at 9:15 a.m. at 407 Millard in Creighton. The warrant was served on behalf of the Nebraska State Patrol, FBI, ATF and the Creighton Police Department. Records show it was during the warrant that Painter was detained, as well as Samuel Rosberg. "After the residence was cleared, federal agents began searching the house. During the search, agents located 23 guns, two of which were shorter than legally allowed and one suppressor," documents showed. "Besides the guns, marijuana and THC carts were also located. Additional agents and investigators located in a fridge a white rocky substance on a tray inside the refrigerator in the living room, which field tested positive for

methamphetamine." The methamphetamine weighed about 1 gram. "Painter acknowledged that she was aware that (Samuel) Rosberg was a drug distributor of methamphetamine, cocaine, marijuana and THC carts. Painter admitted that she had assisted Rosberg in packaging drugs for sale. This package process has been observed on social media accounts that have been searched by warrants," records showed. "Painter's pre-trial was set for Sept. 30 and trial by jury Nov. 17. According to U.S. district attorney's office, Samuel Rosberg, 24, of Creighton, is charged in a three-count indictment. Count I charges Rosberg with possession of an unregistered firearm, identified as a silencer, on or about June 3. The maximum possible penalty if convicted

is not more than 10 years' imprisonment, a \$10,000 fine, a term of supervised release of not more than 3 years, and a \$100 special assessment. Count II charged Rosberg with possession of an unregistered firearm, identified as an LC Smith double barrel shotgun with less than 18-inch barrel. The maximum possible penalty if convicted is not more than 10 years' imprisonment, a \$10,000 fine, a term of supervised release of not more than 3 years, and a \$100 special assessment. Count III charged Rosberg with possession of an unregistered firearm, identified as an Excel shotgun with less than 18-inch barrel. The maximum possible penalty if convicted is not more than 10 years' imprisonment, a \$10,000 fine, a term of supervised release of not more than 3 years, and a \$100 special assessment.

Timeline

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March 19
Knox County Supervisors appointed Omaha attorney David Begley as Special Knox County Attorney to conduct an investigation into possible violations of the county's employee handbook, possible breaches of courthouse security and any violations of Nebraska law.

March 24
District Court Judge James Kube appointed the Nebraska Attorney General's office as special prosecutor to investigate the possible violations of the Nebraska Open Meetings Act involving Knox County employees and/or elected officials.

June 9
District Court Judge James Kube terminated the appointment of Nebraska Attorney General's office as special prosecutor following the completion of an investigation. The Attorney General said that no criminal charges will be forthcoming.

June 12 & July 16
911 Coordinator Heather Kienow was interviewed and said she did not listen when supervisors went into closed session. She could not explain

data showing her credentials logged on during closed-session periods. Her credentials were used Jan. 27 for an emergency meeting between 3:13 p.m. and 3:17 p.m. They were also used for closed sessions Jan. 9 from 11:43 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. Archives were accessed Dec. 11, 2024, Dec. 23, 2024, Jan. 9, 2025, Jan. 22, 2025, and Jan. 23, 2025.

July 16, 2025
County Attorney Hannah Jensen was interviewed by Special Knox County Attorney David Begley. Jensen denied knowing if the supervisors clicked a switch prior to going into closed session despite sitting 10-15 feet from the supervisors' desk. She said the "board didn't ask" for a kill switch. Begley asked Jensen if she told Applied Connective to not install the kill switch, and

Jensen said it was not her. She said she did not speak with technicians when they were on site.

August 15
David Begley and Eric Hagen finalized their report to the Knox County Board of Supervisors regarding breaches of privacy and the Knox County Courthouse.

August 27
Supervisors met in closed session from 8:58 a.m. to 1 p.m. At that time, they released a statement about the report's findings and announced discipline action. County Attorney Hannah Knox was suspended for one year without pay while Chief Deputy Dan Henry and 911 Operator Heather Kienow were fired. Deputy County Attorney John Thomas's position is eliminated.

My Local COUNTY NEWS



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Investigation

- Continued From Page 1
When the new system was installed, a second microphone was placed in the boardroom. Supervisors were unaware of its installation. The report stated no cutoff or toggle switch for the second microphone was installed in the supervisors' room, although one was installed in the courtroom. But someone called Applied Connective, the company that installed the system, and canceled the switch. Ed Knott, owner of Applied Connective, said "an unknown person" at the courthouse called him and canceled the installation of the privacy or cutoff switch. The cost of the audio cutoff switch was \$12." Jensen was specifically asked on July 16 if she was the one who canceled the switch, and she denied it.

Begley, who issued the report, said he did not believe Jensen when she claimed she did not speak with the on-site technicians during installation, calling her "dishonest." He went on to say that, as the then-deputy county attorney, she had a duty to ensure the board's closed-session recordings remained private. "The fact that she did require a kill switch be installed in the courtroom informs my decision and is in stark contrast to her lack of action for the board of supervisors' meeting room," Begley wrote. "She knew how to keep private conversations private in the courtroom, but she chose not to do so in the boardroom. Therefore, Mrs. Jensen violated the County's Code of Ethics as she did not adhere to the Open Meetings Act. There is, however, no evidence that Mrs. Jensen used boardroom audio for personal or improper gain."

That was a sentence the Knox County Supervisors also included in their statement. None of the accused appeared to have used the information for personal gain. One interviewee — Kendra Holtz — said 911 Coordinator Heather Kienow listened to the meetings often. "Apparently, part of Kienow's job duties was to monitor the courthouse video cameras. Kienow would comment to others about the location of people in the courthouse. There was a running joke in the Sheriff's Office about how Kienow seemed to be aware of everyone's movements, leading to feelings of being constantly watched. Holtz was of the opinion it was excessive and gossipy," Begley wrote.

But Kienow denied listening during closed session. The report said Kienow could not explain data showing her credentials logged in during closed-session periods. Her credentials were used Jan. 27 for an emergency meeting between 3:13 p.m. and 3:17 p.m. They were also used for closed sessions Jan. 9 from 11:43 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. Archives were accessed Dec. 11, 2024; Dec. 23, 2024; Jan. 9, 2025; Jan. 22, 2025; and Jan. 23, 2025.

As for Chief Deputy Dan Henry, the report called him "a regular viewer of the county's computer system for the cameras and microphones in the courthouse." The report included an exhibit of user access logs for the board of supervisors' room. On Jan. 21, Henry was shown watching live from 12:09 p.m. to 12:11 p.m. in what was categorized as "possible private conversations regarding staff medical conditions." Four times, his login was used during the Jan. 22 supervisors' meeting.

"The 'Admin User' was reportedly watching live during a Jan. 23 meeting of 'possible private conversations regarding staff medical conditions' twice — from 8:54 a.m. to 9:29 a.m. and again from 9:41 a.m. to 10:27 a.m. There was a third 'possible private conversations regarding staff medical conditions' video accessed by the 'Dan Henry' login on Jan. 24 from 2:49 p.m. to 3:26 p.m. and 3:54 p.m. to 3:59 p.m."

That third log was the day after Dan Henry, Rhonda Surfaas, and Joann Fischer met to discuss the cameras and audio. That day Henry admitted he could "hear everything up in the boardroom." Jensen told both Begley and Hagen she did not have access to the security system, nor has anyone in her office. She has never listened to a closed session unless she was invited by supervisors to stay, and she has never asked anyone to listen to closed session. Jensen also said she was not aware of anyone listening to closed session and has never obtained recordings of the closed sessions.

Sheriff Don Henry was also included in the report. When asked if he knew of anyone in his office who had access to the security and had listened to information in closed session, the sheriff said he did not. "The evidence established that both Chief Deputy Dan Henry and 911 Coordinator Heather Kienow did listen to closed sessions, but I won't assume that the sheriff had knowledge of their actions," Begley wrote. "There is no evidence that the sheriff spoke with the Chief Deputy or the 911 Coordinator about the discussions the Board had in closed session, and I won't speculate that they did."

Begley acknowledged that as an elected official, supervisors could not impose discipline to the sheriff. Even so, "I would not recommend it. His substantive testimony appears truthful and consistent with external data." The sheriff met with supervisors in closed session on Wednesday morning from 10:06 a.m. to 10:44 a.m. The press release from the supervisors stated the sheriff was unwilling to fire his two employees. "The Board of Supervisors has directed Sheriff Don Henry to discharge Chief Deputy Sheriff Dan Henry and 911 Coordinator Heather Kienow, but he refused to do so. The Board, therefore, discharged both persons," Sokol said.

He said the Special Knox County Attorney's report found no evidence of dishonesty or wrongdoing by the Sheriff. Begley repeatedly called the issue a "breach of privacy," County Clerk Joann Fischer agreed, especially as she thought about the many conversations that had occurred where people felt safe. "All the things and all the people that I had talked to throughout the year, to know that people had access to that and were listening to it was very upsetting," Fischer said.

The entire report can be found at the Knox County Website at www.co.knox.ne.us and under the tab "Public Notices."

What Happened

In 2024, a new audio and visual system was installed in the courthouse, approved by Jensen as part of the security committee. Previously, there was a single microphone in the supervisors' meeting room. The old system had a cutoff or toggle switch, which was activated when the board went into closed or confidential sessions as allowed by the Nebraska Open Meetings Act.

Knox County News

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KNOX COUNTY NEWS



The **BLOOMFIELD MONITOR** **Creighton News** **Wausa Gazette**

Wednesday, December 31, 2025

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Runnels reaches 200-win milestone

By ELISHA MEYER
SPORTS EDITOR

Niobrara/Verdigre girls basketball coach Todd Runnels let superstition guide his approach to the pending milestone of 200 career victories that slowly but surely had crept up.

He treated Monday's clash against Wausa like any other game preparation he's conducted in a coaching career that has developed in Knox County since around the turn of the century. The Vikings in particular had worried Runnels.

"I kind of really prepared extra hard for these guys, you know, because I thought they're capable of beating us," he said.

But as many sports superstitions dictate, if you talk about it, it won't happen.

Runnels, abiding by the superstitious rules, didn't talk about it, and it remained unspoken until the final horn sounded in Wausa Public Schools. Only then did Runnels' extra supply of worry faded, replaced by the joy of sharing the moment with a squad that has reminded him of the benefits of facing the many hardships of figuring out how to win at the game he continues to oversee.

"I was really nervous and didn't want to jinx it," he said. "You know, those guys, it means a lot to get to it with them."

And winning has always been a larger accomplishment at the schools he's coached for, starting at Isanti as the longtime boys coach before eventually coaching the Niobrara/Verdigre boys

— See **RUNNELS**, page 13



Todd Runnels kneels in front of the 2025-26 Niobrara/Verdigre girls basketball team whose Monday victory against Wausa gave him his 200th career win in coaching basketball.



KNOX COUNTY

Courthouse closed
Knox County Courthouse will be closed December 25 and 26 as well as January 1.

BLOOMFIELD

Blood drive planned
The Bloomfield Community Center will be holding a Blood Drive on Monday, January 5, from 12:30 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

CREIGHTON

Gun Show set
The Gun Show will be held on January 10th & 11th at the Creighton Community Center.

Blood mobile
The Life Serve Blood Drive will be held at the Creighton Community Center January 9th from 12:30-6:00 p.m.

NELIGH

Gun Swap planned
The 35th Annual Gun Show & Swap Meet will be held on January 3rd & 4th at the Antelope County Fairgrounds.

LEGAL NOTICES

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- Village of Wausa
- Logan East Rural Water

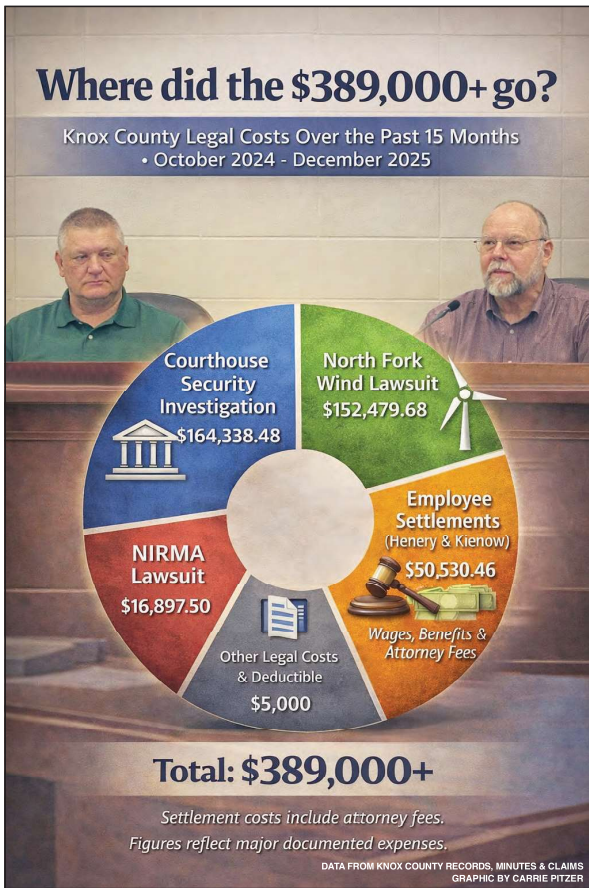
Look For Legals on Pages 9
This newspaper is a legal publication for Knox County, City/Villages of Bloomfield, Creighton & Wausa, Bloomfield, Creighton & Wausa Schools, Lewis & Clark NRD, NCPD, State of Nebraska and others.

WEATHER

Friday High 41 Low 29 Precip: 5%
Saturday High 44 Low 27 Precip: 13%
Sunday High 44 Low 23 Precip: 5%

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1 Section, 14 Pages

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Legal issues cost county \$389,000+ in last 15 months

By CARRIE PITZER
PUBLISHER

Knox County has paid more than \$389,000 in attorney fees and related legal costs over the past 15 months, driven largely by a wind-energy lawsuit, a courthouse security investigation, insurance litigation and disputes that ultimately ended with terminated employees being reinstated.

County records show the bulk of the payments went to Special Knox County Attorney David D. Begley and attorneys working under or alongside him, with most of the expenses paid from the county's inheritance tax fund. He was hired by the board as special county attorney on Sept. 18, 2024, per Resolution 2024-23 to defend Knox County, its Supervisors and members of the Planning Commission in the North Fork Wind lawsuit.

Since that date, claims approved by the County Supervisors show Knox County has paid \$252,067.10 to Begley, \$81,648.56 to attorney Eric M. Hagen, \$11,888.90 for attorney fees in a settlement to Chief Deputy Sheriff Daniel Henery, \$10,000 for attorney fees in a settlement to 911 Coordinator Heather Kienow and a \$5,000 deductible paid to the Nebraska Intergovernmental Risk Management Association, or NIRMA.

Oct. 15 minutes show the county transferred \$402,210.92 from the inheritance tax fund to the general fund. Under state statute, inheritance tax revenue may be used for county services and infrastructure at the discretion of the county board. The fund is often treated as a cash reserve and used for roads and bridges, property tax relief and

emergency response situations such as flood disasters.

As of Dec. 30, Knox County Treasurer Lori Ebel said the inheritance funds currently has \$1,666,485.27

Lawsuits

The most expensive single case involves North Fork Wind v. Knox County, a federal lawsuit challenging zoning changes related to wind towers. Begley represents the county and county supervisors in the case, which remains pending in U.S. District Court.

County records show Begley billed and was paid \$152,479.68 between Oct. 2, 2024, and Dec. 24, 2025, for work on the wind lawsuit.

Begley also represents the county in Knox County v. NIRMA, filed in Lancaster County District Court. In that case, the county sued its own insurance provider after objecting to the attorney assigned by NIRMA to defend the wind case. Court filings state the county objected on political grounds.

Begley billed and was paid \$16,897.50 for work on the NIRMA lawsuit between Dec. 23, 2024, and Dec. 24, 2025.

A second major expense followed the launch of a courthouse security investigation in March 2025. Begley was hired to conduct the investigation, with Eric M. Hagen serving as deputy special county attorney.

Through Dec. 24, 2025, Begley billed and was paid \$82,689.92 for the investigation, while Hagen billed and was paid \$81,648.56. The combined cost for courthouse security-related legal work totals \$164,338.48.

Included in that figure is — See **LEGAL**, page 13

Arrests made in crime spree; not all burglaries related

By CARRIE PITZER
PUBLISHER

More details have been released in a string of thefts and burglaries in Knox and Cedar counties during the Christmas weekend, including confirmation that the incidents were not all related.

According to Knox County Sheriff Don Henery, Rolando Jaimes, 21, and Clifford Yost, 21, both of Santee, are being held in the Knox County Jail in connection with three burglaries in Knox County and one burglary in Cedar County.

Sheriff Henery said a week-long investigation involving the Knox County

Sheriff's Office, Santee Sioux Nation Police Department, Verdigre Police Department, Cedar County Sheriff's Office and Norfolk Police Division led to three suspects being detained. Arrest warrants are being requested for two additional individuals, including a juvenile, in connection with the burglaries in Knox and Cedar counties.

Authorities recovered more than \$90,000 in stolen property during the investigation. Items recovered include multiple side-by-side UTVs, a Massey Ferguson four-wheel-drive tractor with a loader, numerous firearms, deer antlers and mounts and assorted hunting equipment

and gear.

A 15-year-old juvenile is being held at the Youth Detention Center in Madison for burglary related to the break-in at the Bohemian One Stop on Dec. 26, 2025. Sheriff Henery said an arrest warrant will also be requested for a 17-year-old involved in that burglary. Approximately \$315 worth of hard liquor was recovered from that scene.

According to the Knox County Sheriff's Office, deputies were called at approximately 5:01 a.m. Dec. 26 to the Bohemian One Stop just north of Verdigre after the owner reported two people

broke out a mostly glass door and entered the business. The owner confronted the suspects with a handgun, and they ran from the store, entered a dark-colored vehicle and left the area. Authorities said the suspects did not threaten the owner or display weapons themselves.

The Knox County Sheriff's Office and the Verdigre Police Department responded to the call and began investigating the burglary.

Sheriff Henery said all burglaries were reported between Dec. 25 and Dec. 27, but — See **CRIME**, page 13

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

Creighton Branch
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Midwest Bank

Closing at 1:00 pm on Christmas Eve
Closed on Christmas Day
Closing at 3:00 pm on New Year's Eve
Closed on New Year's Day

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Runnels

- Continued From Page 1
and now the girls. Runnels is just in his second year coaching the Cougars on the ladies' bench, a group he said he could see competing for a district championship.
It's territory Runnels has yearned to see in a career dedicated to working with less and more than a fair share of losses. But he's never worried about losing, only about what can be earned in each defeat that can lead them back to the winning side.
"I didn't want to lose," he said. "But that's just a part of it. Unless you're a St. Mary's or Wymot, it's kind of hard to stay on top every single year. It goes in cycles."
Each of his stints had their winning stretches, the early 2000s for Isanti after ending a lengthy multi-season losing skid and the early years of his stint as the boys

coach for the Cougars as well. The successes of last year's 17-9 mark in his first season with the N/V girls have already carried into this season as well.
His overall coaching mark will never be as pretty as others who have reached the 200-win milestone, but he said he will have the benefit of working with kids that might be motivated enough to do what he does every time a game is afoot and simply prepare and take it the best way you can.
And, he added, that might prepare those among them who wish to take on a role like his.
"Some of them are potentially going to go on to be coaches themselves someday, and it's important that they are taught things the best way you can teach them. They'll probably pull back and teach somebody themselves."

2025 SPECIAL BIRTHDAYS

- Judy Friedrichsen, 85th Birthday, March 3
Dottie Babcock, 95th birthday, March 8
Douglas Lindquist, 90th Birthday, March 22
Lavern Lehner, 100th birthday, March 22
Wilhelmina Boecker's, 90th Birthday, March 30
Cheryl Alexander, 80th Birthday, April 30
Don Eggen, 95th birthday, April 25th
Herb Ziegenbein, 95th birthday, June 13th.
Sharon Peters, 85th birthday, July 27
June Andersen, 99th birthday, July 30
Gary Ralston, 90th birthday, August 10
Marvin Krugman, 90th birthday, August 15
Myrthalene Barta, 90th birthday, September 3
Donna Mae Van Houten, 90 birthday, July 28
Shirley Doerr, 90th birthday, September 20
Dwain Davids, 80th birthday, October 6
Lois Frevert, 90th birthday, November 1
John G. Moehlenhoff Sr. 90th birthday

Legal

- Continued From Page 1
Before the board's August action items, the county employed both a full-time county attorney and a deputy county attorney at an annual cost of \$102,620, or about \$8,551 per month. In November and December, county spending under the revised structure totaled \$20,019.11, or about \$10,009.56 per month.
Deputy Investigation
Separate from the courthouse security investigation, county records show more than \$4,500 has been spent on work tied to Begley's repeated assertions that Knox County Sheriff's deputies were not legally appointed.
Begley claimed deputies were not properly hired under Nebraska Revised Statute § 23-1704.01 because written certificates of appointment were not filed with the county clerk. He has publicly suggested arrests made by deputies could be challenged and cases dismissed.
County and state records contradict Begley's claims. The Nebraska Crime Commission confirmed all deputies are certified, and county employment records list them as county employees.
"They are enrolled as employees of the county," Nebraska Crime Commission Executive Director Bryan Tuma said. "That to me meets the requirement that he's filed the certificate with the clerk."
In a Nov. 10 public online post on Althouse, Begley stated, "I'm the Special Knox County (Nebraska) Attorney. I told The Knox County News (Carrie Pitzer) that none of the Knox County Deputies were properly hired because there is no certificate of appointment on file with the County Clerk as required by Neb. Rev. Stat. Section 23-1704.01."
In a Nov. 11 letter to the Knox County Public Defender, Begley made the same assertion and wrote, "Best of luck on your motions to dismiss in Knox County."
Over the weekend, he wrote in a public comment on the Knox County News that if "any Knox County deputy arrested anyone recently,

the criminal defense could file a motion to dismiss and it should be granted."
County claims show billings filed specifically to deputy employment and appointment issues, including repeated emails, research and correspondence with the county clerk, as well as reading the Knox County News.
• Sept. 21: Email to Joann Fischer regarding filing of appointment of a deputy sheriff
• Sept. 23: Written appointment of Dan Henery per Nebraska Revised Statute § 23-1704.01
• Sept. 26: Email to Joann Fischer regarding written appointments of deputies on file with the clerk
• Sept. 26: Emails back and forth with the county clerk regarding written appointments filed by the sheriff for all deputies
• Sept. 29: Emails back and forth with the county clerk regarding written appointments filed by the sheriff for all deputies
• Oct. 1: Email to the county clerk regarding certificates of appointment for deputies
• Oct. 2: Email regarding criminal law view on failure of deputies to be properly appointed
• Oct. 9: Email regarding failure to appoint deputies, research
• Oct. 16: Billing for reading a Knox County News story
• Oct. 18: Emails asserting no certificates of appointment were filed for deputies
Begley attended the Oct. 15 board meeting and was paid from the inheritance fund. It included several travel- and meal-related expenses, as well as time billed for attending the meeting. Expenses included \$20.93 at the Bloomfield Bakery, \$11.58 at Prime Stop and \$10.72 at Casey's.
At \$315 per hour, three hours were billed on Oct. 14 for travel to Knox County and three hours on Oct. 15 for travel from Center to Omaha. Attendance at the Knox County Board meeting on Oct. 15 accounted for another 7.3 hours, totaling more than \$4,200 for that trip to Knox County.

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Split

- Continued From Page 4
stuff and play through our posts," he said. "I thought we did a decent job of getting the ball inside a decent amount. We kind of took some tough shots through double teams and maybe didn't kick it out as much as I had hoped, but we did do a decent job getting inside."
The Vikings have two more days of December action at the Creighton Holiday Tournament. The Cougars will resume play in the New Year.
Girls
NV 13 14 16 7 - 50
Wausa 8 2 13 8 - 31
NV: Taylen Stark 11p, 4r, 3a, 3s; Lymae Nielsen 2p, 2r, 3a, 2s, 1b; Delani Runnels 2p, 1a, 3s, 1b; McKenzie Runnels 2p; Maura Hoferer 6r, 2a; Amber Sucha 10p, 6r, 1a, 1b; Jacie Strom 2p, 2r; Payton Frederick 1s.
Wausa: Kenley Anderson 3p, 3r; Reagan Gilliam 5p, 1r, 2s, 1b; Avery Stevens 7r, 1s; Carlie Kleinschmitt 12r, 1s; Halle Kump 2p, 1r; Taylor Dawson 17p, 8r; Molly Atken 1r; Emma Brazel 1r; Isabelle Seagren 1s; Sydney Hoppe 2r.
Boys
NV 5 2 8 7 - 22
Wausa 16 12 11 12 - 51
NV: Julius Brandt 2p, 1r, 1s; Gage Vesely 1r; Danny Pease 5r, 2a, 1s; Leon Coffman 2p, 5r; Kash Nielsen 12p, 5r, 2s, 2b; Snye Denmark 4r, 2b; Jett Denney 2p, 1r, 1s; Edward Droby 2p, 1a, 1s, 2b; Parker Frank 1r, 1s; Levi Hoefler 2p, 1r.

Battle

- Continued From Page 4
he said, "I was proud of our kids for battling an even match, capturing the lead after Elgin came back," he said.
Sitting at a much-improved 4-3 after the narrow 53-43 loss, Creighton's skills will be tested in its home holiday tournament where a semifinal win against NGE will likely set up a rematch with Wausa.
"We hope to take some momentum into the holiday tournament," Nilson said. "It will

Court

- Continued From Page 4
Crofton, with the home holiday tournament remaining in December, has already doubled its win total from last season in a start that holds the possibility of picking up the program's first winning season since 2013-14.
Monday, December 22
Girls
WIN 2 12 6 4 - 24
CRO 18 13 23 11 - 63
Crofton: Jaylynn Panning 3p, 1r, 1s; Avery Arens 2a, 1s; Jazzmyr Wieseler 6p, 4r, 1s; Hudson Stout 2p, Jacie Anthony 13p, 5r, 1a, 2s; Addison Ostermeyer 9p, 3r, 1a, 2b; Brooklyn Guenther 1p, 3r; Emma Kuchta 3r; Seanna Pinkelton 9p, 2r, 5s, 5s; Jaisie Janssen 19p, 14r, 2a, 1s, 2b; Camry Michael 2p, 1a, 1s.
Boys
WIN 5 5 10 3 - 23
CRO 18 25 16 13 - 72
Crofton: Trevor Allen 18p, 2r, 7a, 3s; Preston Foxhoven 15p, 3r, 6a, 2s; Blake Connet 5p, 1r, 1s; Bo Drotzmann 6p, 2s; Jackson Lynde 4p, 5r, 1a, 1s; Corbin Bert 2p; Jace Panning 4r, 1a, 1s; Jaren Panning 5p, 1r, 1a, 2s; Brackin Jansen 2p, 1a, 2s; Tyson Jackson 5p, 4r, 2s; Brayton Mueller 2p; Easton Schendel 2p, 1r, 2a, 3s; Pyker Guenther 1r.

Crime

- Continued From Page 1
the Bohemian One Stop incident does not appear to be related to the other burglaries reported in Knox and Cedar counties.
Deputies were called during the night of Dec. 24 to a residence about two miles east of Lindsay. In that case, homeowners were awakened by someone kicking their door. The suspects left after hearing the occupants inside the home. Authorities again reported no indication that weapons were involved.
Sheriff Henery said reports from the investigation were forwarded to the acting Knox County attorney, the Nebraska County Attorney General's Office, the Cedar County Attorney, the Madison County Attorney and the Assistant U.S. Attorney's Office. The investigation remains ongoing, and additional arrests are possible.

2025 ANNIVERSARIES

- James and Sherry Babcock, 50th Anniversary, May 31
Allen & Norma Ober, 60th Anniversary, June 5
Dale and Mary Jane Nielsen, 70th Anniversary, August 14
Marvin and Maxine Haswell, 75th Anniversary, August 13
Ron & Sharon Busch, 70th Anniversary, August 21
Owen and Judy Davis, 60th Anniversary, October 10
Gary and Rebah Opkis, 50th Anniversary, November 8
Bob and Florene Munter, 74th Anniversary

2025 DEATHS

- James Blohm, December 8
Karen Parker, December 22
Bernard Straatmeyer, December 25
Dan Stark, December 25
Carolyn Zavadi, December 27
Mary Jo Kershner, December 28
Bruce Jorgensen, January 2
Wyman McCain, January 3
Mary Jo Breece, January 4
Patricia Philipp, January 6
Victoria Achenbach, January 7
Lyle Scott, January 8
Donald Eisenhauer, January 12
Donald Cavanaugh, January 12
David Sund, January 13
Grace Pavlik, January 14
Josephine Nagengast, January 18
Gary Hornback, February 14
Francis Balleweg, February 24
Mark Olson, January 27
Robert Lingenfelter, January 29
Aaron Emory, January 30
Bernard Jorgensen, February 2
Hazel Krohn, February 5
Erna Kriz, February 15
Annette Schwartz, February 16
Henry Ebel, February 17
Henry Ebel, February 17
Jim Lovejoy, February 17
Fern Stacken Goodman, February 20
Rita Murray, February 20
Delores Bloomquist, February 23
Dennis Lowin, February 26
Robert Bruns, February 27
Anton "Tony" Wevel, March 1
Billie Fritz, March 2
Gerald Schumacher, march 4
Kathleen Claussen, March 7
Lyle Miller, March 13
Richard McManigal, March 26
Jane Larson, April 4
Beverly Gentzler, April 8
Fern Schlaumann, April 9
Connie Zimmerman, April 10
Todd Grimm, April 13
Kenneth Meyer, April 27
Robert McGill, May 7
Sharon Boelter, May 10
Orpha Kalkowski, May 19
Lou Ann DeLozier, May 28
Karen Riesberg, May 29
Sandra Dennis, June 1
Sandra "Sandy" Beltz, May 31
Shirley Eckstrom, May 31
Beverly Eggen, June 6
Roger Boyer, June 7
Cemlyn Huxar, September 11
Joyce Eggers, June 15
Karen Finck, June 18
Edwin Christiansen, June 25
Dorothy Dwyer, June 29
Terry Curtis, July 1
Jesus Gutierrez, August 14
Kathy Riesberg, July 9
Jean Bargman, July 18
Michael Wintz, July 21
Douglas Joseph, July 29
Kayleen Reppening, July 30
Claudia Heston, August 14
Douglas Lindquist, August 15
Clarence Ganselom, August 21
Leland Christiansen, August 28
Loring North, August 29
Beverly Brown, September 5
Edward Doerr, September 7
Reverend Michael Schmitz, September 9
Mildred Dorr, September 12
Keith Kracht, September 14
Keith Brash, September 18
Gordon Carlson, September 19
Irene Fuchtmann, September 25
Stuart Nelson, September 23
Lois Patras, September 24
Lita Moseman, September 25
Marsha Wenge, September 30
Gordon Fulton, October 2
Earl Gilsdorf, October 7
Carol McKee, October 8
William Stolp, October 14
Floyd Neumann, October 25
Leslie Huttman, October 28
Linda Wahrer, November 2
Ruth Ann Grimm, November 3
Danny Strom, November 3
Lyle Larsen, November 6
Marelene Grunke, November 13
Barbara Parks, November 13
Joyce Eckhardt, November 17
Carol Euard, November 21
Janice Pahl, November 25
Amy Willats, November 25
Shirley Doerr, December 1
Glady Erickson, December 11
LaVern Lehner, December 12
Arlene Doerr, December 13
Elaine Mathine, December 15
Beth Grubbs, December 19

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County reinstates, settles, terminates

Supervisors admit Open Meetings violations

By **CARRIE PITZER**
PUBLISHER

Nearly 10 months to the day of when courthouse security concerns first erupted in Knox County, supervisors on Wednesday reinstated two employees, approved settlement agreements and then reinstated — and later terminated — the county attorney. All while publicly acknowledging they violated the Nebraska Open Meetings Act during earlier disciplinary actions.

The latest decisions involved Chief Deputy Sheriff Dan Henery and 911 Coordinator Heather Kienow, who were discharged on Aug. 27 during a closed session the board now concedes was improper, as well as County Attorney Hanna Knox Jensen, who was suspended at that same meeting.

On Wednesday, supervisors voted to reinstate Dan Henery and Kienow and to accept settlements in connection with their earlier terminations. They also reinstated Jensen as county attorney and just 31 seconds later moved on to the agenda item to terminate her employment.

While reading prepared statements, supervisors repeatedly scrutinized Sheriff Don Henery for not firing his employees, including his brother.

Wednesday's moves were the newest chapter in an extended controversy involving courthouse audio and video systems, more than a dozen closed meetings, questions over privacy of both county meetings and courthouse personnel, a five-month investigation and 41-

page report, both sealed and unsealed court documents and ongoing litigation over what can be released to the public.

Board Reverses August 27 Actions

The Aug. 27 meeting saw four courthouse officials targeted: Henery, Kienow, Jensen and Deputy County Attorney John Thomas, whose position was eliminated. Action with the first three items were taken in closed session.

Henery and Kienow met with Knox County Supervisors for just three minutes that day. The duo was then escorted out of the boardroom as the words "get boxes" were mumbled while they made their way to the courthouse basement.

But the Chief Deputy and 911 Coordinator weren't the only Knox County employees on the chopping block. The County Attorney was suspended for one year without pay and the Deputy Attorney had his position eliminated.

After consulting with outside counsel and insurer NTRMA, supervisors acknowledged Wednesday that their August actions did not comply with the Nebraska Open Meetings Act and needed to be corrected in open session.

Supervisor Kevin Mlady said the board had been "made aware that we did not follow the Open Meetings Act" and that the board knew it had to "correct this," even as he maintained the underlying concerns about courthouse security were valid.

— See **COUNTY**, page 11



PHOTOS BY CARRIE PITZER

Hanna Knox Jensen was appointed Wednesday as Acting Knox County Attorney. Thirty-one seconds after the appointment, Knox County Supervisors moved onto a new agenda item — terminating her from the position. She's shown before reading a statement to the *Knox County News*.

WAUSA

Gift wrapping event

Wausa will be having a gift wrapping fundraiser on Dec. 7, that starts at 9 a.m. Drop off and pick up will be at Elite Diesel. Free will donation per gift.

Christmas in Wausa

A night of activities is planned in Wausa on Monday, Dec. 8, beginning with the tree lighting at 5:30 p.m. Santa will be at the library.

BLOOMFIELD

Santa, vendor fair

The Bloomfield Community Club is bringing Santa to town on Dec. 6 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., at the high school. There will be horse and buggy rides, vendor fair and a soup dinner as well.

Open house event

Bank of Hartington will hold their Christmas Open House on Dec. 4 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Angels Among Us

The Hunhoff family is excited to announce the 7th Annual "Angels Among Us" gift shopping event in memory of their loved one Phyllis Hunhoff. Donations will be accepted anytime now through Dec. 12. Donations can be dropped off at Joe Hunhoff CPA PC.

CREIGHTON

Open house, retirement

Midwest Bank of Creighton will honor Steve Schindler's retirement and host a Holiday Open House on Dec. 5 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Parade of Lights

The Bloomfield Community Club is bringing Santa to town on

VERDIGRE

Tour of homes

The Verdigre Tour of Homes will be Dec. 6 from 2:30 to 5:30. Contact Kelsy 402-394-1346 or see the ad for QR code.

Community Chorus

Verdigre Community Chorus will be performing on Dec. 7 in Verdigre at 1:30 p.m. and in Bloomfield Dec. 10 at 7 p.m.

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- Creighton School

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This newspaper is a legal publication for Knox County, City/Villages of Bloomfield, Creighton & Wausa, Bloomfield, Creighton & Wausa Schools, Lewis & Clark NRD; NCCPD, State of Nebraska and others.

WEATHER

Friday	Saturday	Sunday
High: 37	High: 34	High: 24
Low: 22	Low: 17	Low: 15
Precip: 6%	Precip: 46%	Precip: 18%

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A DRAMATIC RUN AT STATE



20th straight for Wausa dynasty

By **ELISHA MEYER**
NEWS WRITER

It never gets easier for Wausa coach Sheila Hoelsing to wait for the make it or break it decision of the judges.

Play production in Nebraska is equally wonderful in its celebration of the arts and cultural in its selection of the very best. Wausa, despite a run of 20 consecutive seasons making it to the state championships, was simply back in the hunt as one of 46 Class D1 teams hoping to take one of the six open slots reserved this year for the best of the best.

Hoelsing, the coach and playwright behind the legendary small-town success of Wausa's productions, never considers one of those six spots a sure thing.

"Every year, you just get more and more worried that you're going to be able to help those kids get there," she said. "I never want them to be the ones (that missed)."

"This would not be that group as the Vikings' production of Hoelsing's slapstick witty hit of a comedy "Breaking the Habit" earned them a 20th consecutive state berth. It's the longest active streak in the NSAA, and they now have the chance to earn what would be a sixth consecutive championship and 17th crown under Hoelsing. The Vikings have never finished under the top three in its last 19 seasons and have a post-championship streak of at least five seasons three times.

Wausa's leading cast members, including

— See **WAUSA**, page 13

Veterans, community key to Creighton's one-act success



By **CARRIE PITZER**
PUBLISHER

The stage lights rose on teenagers wearing uniforms from a war fought decades before they were even born — yet somehow, the emotion felt startlingly real.

As Creighton Community Schools performed "Two Fronts," voices cracked, hands trembled, judges' eyes watered — not because the story belonged to them, but because they knew it belonged to people they see in grocery lines, church pews and local memorial services.

This is the story of veterans and our country.

When the final scene faded, Creighton earned its first state one-act berth since 2021 — but

the honor wasn't measured only in scores or medals. It was in the quiet thanks whispered many times throughout the season by veterans who saw their sacrifices reflected with dignity on stage as the students performed for them time and again.

"It's super exciting being my first year as head coach, getting to take these kids that I've — especially the seniors that I've had for the past four years — getting to see them bloom and get to state," said director Nicole Strope. "With this play in general, it's pretty awesome to get to take it to state, because it's one we wanted to commemorate our veterans and especially our local veterans."

Originally written as a 30-minute competition drama "Two Fronts" by Nebraska playwright Christy Fredrickson explores the dual realities of World War II — the fighting overseas and the waiting at home. Soldiers risk their lives on battlefields while families pray over letters and ration cards, stepping into factory work that once belonged only to men.

Though the story wasn't about Creighton, Strope said the students understood its weight because it was about those who have served. Those who live here.

The most powerful preparation didn't happen on stage — it happened face-to-face with veterans.

— See **ONE-ACT**, page 11

GUN RAFFLE
Buy a Pizza, Get a Raffle Ticket

HUSKER C-MART

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Drawings: Dec 11 November and Dec 18 December
Prize: Guns purchased from Raffle Fund

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KNOX COUNTY County

- Continued From Page 1

Supervisor Danny Schlote said the board was being forced to balance "what is morally and ethically right and what is lawful under the Nebraska statute," emphasizing that the board's authority is limited in some personnel matters.

Supervisor Marty O'Connor noted that the reinstatements were made by law and on the advice of NIRMA, but he argued that they did not change the facts as the board sees them regarding policy violations and privacy concerns.

Thomas's former position was not restored as part of Wednesday's actions. Instead, the board reaffirmed its decision made at the August 20 board meeting to eliminate the Deputy County Attorney position effective Sept. 6.

As the board prepared to act on her employment status, Jensen asked to speak publicly. Board Chairman Jim Sokol refused the request. When Jensen again requested to address supervisors, specifically stating that it pertained to her employment, attorney Mark Fahleson told her "public comment was earlier in the meeting."

Jensen later delivered her statement outside the formal agenda, saying she was speaking for "taxpayers, voters and Knox County residents" who are "still wondering what is going on" after a lengthy and costly investigation. As of Nov. 1, claims show Knox County has paid attorneys David Begley \$17,457.29 and Eric Hagen \$66,567.64 for a total of \$83,824.57.

She disputed key findings of the investigative report, including references to a "hidden microphone" and suggestions that she intentionally allowed a lack of a privacy switch in the boardroom. Jensen argued that the security committee's work was collaborative and that she never approved anything on behalf of the board.

"You took action against me based on hearsay," she said of the investigation, asserting that the investigator "had to do anything he could to come to a conclusion of wrongdoing" to justify the cost.

Jensen defended Thomas at length, calling him "an absolute wealth of knowledge" and criticizing how he was treated after decades of service.

Dan Henery said he requested multiple times to see the evidence against him but was denied access.

"I was told that I could see the evidence when it was released to the public on the Knox County website. I told the Board of Supervisors that there wasn't any evidence because I didn't listen to any closed sessions," he said "I was then escorted off of the courthouse campus by a Supervisor and special security."

Both Henery and Jensen recently spoke publicly for the first time. Jensen immediately read a statement live on the Knox County News Facebook page after last week's meeting, and Henery delivered a letter to the editor on Tuesday morning.

"I have remained quiet about the 'Breaches of Privacy at the Knox County Courthouse' until now. I will not resort to disrespecting the Board of Supervisors. I will not try to convince anyone to side with me, I am only telling the facts of the investigation concerning me," Henery said, later adding, "I did not do anything illegal, and I was not dishonest."

To county residents, Jensen emphasized that supervisors are elected and accountable. "They are subject to recall. They can be voted out of office," she said, urging voters to get involved if they are unhappy with how the situation has been handled.

When asked following her statement if she planned to run for Knox County Attorney in 2026, Jensen replied, "You bet."

Supervisors Cite Privacy, Forensic Data

Board members used Wednesday's meeting to restate their concerns over what they view as serious privacy breaches tied to the courthouse camera and audio system. The day the individuals in question were disciplined, the county released a 41-page breach of security report, where all four individuals were interviewed, named and scrutinized.

The issues stemmed from a kill switch not being installed or used after camera and audio equipment upgrades. That allowed others to hear private conversations during closed meetings of supervisors, as well as personal meetings involving employees. One such meeting, believed to have been overheard, involved counseling an employee who was considering suicide.

The report was prepared by David Begley and Eric Hagen, who served as special deputy Knox County Attorney, respectively, due to conflicts within the county.

In 2024, a new audio and visual system was installed in the courthouse, approved by Jensen as part of the security committee. As of Wednesday, that committee has issued orders to the seven county supervisors meaning no action can be taken on any security issues outside of a public meeting or without prior public notice due to the Open Meetings Act.

Previously, there was a single microphone in the supervisors' meeting room. The old system had a cutoff or toggle switch, which was activated when the board went into closed or confidential sessions as allowed by the Nebraska Open Meetings Act.

When the new security system was installed, a second microphone was placed in the boardroom. Supervisors were unaware of its installation. The report stated no cutoff or toggle switch for the second microphone was installed in the supervisors' room, although one was installed in the courtroom.

But someone called Applied Connective, the company that installed the system, and canceled the switch. Ed Knott, owner of Applied Connective, said "an unknown person from the courthouse called his company and canceled the installation of the privacy or cutoff switch. The cost of the auto cutoff switch was \$12." Jensen was specifically asked on July 16 if she was the one who canceled the switch, and she denied doing so.

Begley, who issued the report, said he did not believe Jensen when she claimed she did not speak with the on-site technicians during installation, calling her "dishonest." He went on to say that, as the then-deputy county attorney, she had a duty to ensure the board's closed-session communication remained private.

"The fact that she did require a kill switch be installed in the courtroom informs my decision and is in stark contrast to her lack of action for the board of supervisors' meeting room," Begley wrote. "She knew how to keep private conversations private in the courtroom, but she chose not to do so in the boardroom. Therefore, Mrs. Jensen violated the County's Code of Ethics as she did not adhere to the Open Meetings Act. There is, however, no evidence that Mrs. Jensen used boardroom audio for personal or improper gain."

That was a sentence the Knox County Supervisors

also included in their statement. None of the accused appeared to have used the information for personal gain. One interviewee — Kendra Holtz — said 911 Coordinator Heather Kienow listened to the meetings often.

"Apparently, part of Kienow's job duties was to monitor the courthouse video cameras. Kienow would comment to others about the location of people in the courthouse. There was a running joke in the Sheriff's Office about how Kienow seemed to be aware of everyone's movements, leading to feelings of being constantly watched. Holtz was of the opinion it was excessive and gossip," Begley wrote.

Henery directly challenged the investigative report's conclusion that he listened to closed sessions, saying the user access logs proved he did not. He also adamantly denied listening to possible private conversations regarding staff medical conditions.

"If you look at the last five pages of his report under the heading of 'User Access Logs' Board of Supervisors' Room," there is a chart with closed session dates and times. There are also dates and times that I was logged into the camera system. It does not show me logged into the camera system during any closed sessions," he said. "I did not listen to any private conversations regarding staff medical conditions. I did not listen to private conversations. The chart shows a date for these occurrences. It does not show a date. Because they do not know what time these conversations occurred, it is being assumed that I was listening to private conversations."

Sheriff Henery's Role Scrutinized

Sheriff Don Henery has been a central — though not disciplined — figure in the courthouse security controversy, with both investigators and supervisors raising questions about his oversight of the security system and the conduct of personnel within his department. Sheriff Henery has consistently disputed the conclusions drawn in the investigative report.

During Wednesday's meeting, multiple supervisors said they believed the sheriff should have internally disciplined employees whose logins appeared in the forensic analysis.

Supervisor Mladý said, "One person could have addressed these issues. He has the responsibility to discipline his department employees. Had he done so, we would not be in this situation."

Supervisor O'Connor said the sheriff "knew about the microphone for over a year and did not tell us," adding that he believed the sheriff should have taken corrective action.

These assertions reflect the Supervisors' interpretation of events as laid out in the investigative report. However, they do not indicate criminal wrongdoing by the sheriff or anyone else. The Nebraska Attorney General's Office investigated and announced no criminal charges would be filed.

Sheriff Henery has publicly disagreed with several aspects of the investigation, particularly the interpretation of the computer logs and the characterization that employees "listened to closed sessions" in the manner the report suggested. He has also denied wrongdoing related to any microphone installation or cancellation and has stated that any monitoring of courthouse systems was done for legitimate security and operational reasons.

Chief Deputy Dan Henery said his use of the camera system was strictly tied to his security role, and that its design makes it impossible to show which individual camera is being watched at any given time.

"As a deputy, I was security for the courthouse, which is why I was using the camera system. When a person logs into the camera system, they are logged into over 40 cameras at once. There isn't a way of logging into just one camera; therefore, there is no way of showing which individual camera is being watched live," he said.

Henery said he organized the cameras that he watched into three separate folders with about 12 cameras in each folder. The folders were for the basement floor, second floor and third floor of the courthouse.

"This made it easier to find cameras in the event of an emergency," he said. "As far as the boardroom, I was unaware of any audio or kill switch until I was requested to investigate it on Jan. 22, 2025. I reported my findings on that date. Prior to and after that date, I never listened to any audio in the boardroom."

Multiple supervisors emphasized Wednesday that Nebraska law gives the sheriff — not the board — authority over the hiring, firing and discipline of sheriff's department employees. Chairman Jim Sokol said the board's "hands are tied" when it comes to imposing discipline within the sheriff's office.

This legal structure has become a point of friction, as some supervisors have called for action they cannot themselves take, while the sheriff has maintained that discipline must be based on accurate information and verified misconduct. Sheriff Henery issued an earlier statement that he was "very disappointed" in the board's actions and cited concerns about the accuracy of the investigative report by Special Attorney Begley.

"Neither they nor myself, as their elected official employer, were given an opportunity to read and respond to the 40+ page report and the many errors in the report before the Board fired them," Henery said. "Even though I requested and was refused the report two days before the August 27, 2025 meeting."

Sheriff Henery remains in office and has announced his candidacy for an additional term. Some supervisors urged him Wednesday to fire employees, but no disciplinary actions were announced. With the reinstatement of both Kienow and Dan Henery, it is the sheriff's legal authority over their employment — any future personnel decisions within the sheriff's office will rest exclusively with him.

Kienow was not present during Wednesday's meeting, but Dan Henery was and said he will return to his position with Knox County after the first of the year.

Who Was Listening?

While Kienow denied listening during closed sessions, the report said she could not explain data showing her credentials logged in during closed-session periods. Her credentials were active on Jan. 27 for an emergency meeting between 3:13 p.m. and 3:17 p.m. They were also used for closed sessions Jan. 9 from 11:43 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. Archives were accessed Dec. 11, 2024; Dec. 23, 2024; Jan. 9, 2025; Jan. 23, 2025; and Jan. 23, 2025.

As for Chief Deputy Dan Henery, the report called him the "regular user" of the county's computer system for the cameras and microphones in the courthouse." The report included an exhibit of user access logs for the board of supervisors' room. On Jan. 21, Henery was shown watching live from 12:09 p.m. to 12:11 p.m. in what was categorized as "possible private conversations regarding staff medical conditions." Following his login was used during the Jan. 22 supervisors' meeting.

The "Admin User" was reportedly watching live during a Jan. 23 meeting of "possible private conversations regarding staff medical conditions" twice — from 8:54 a.m. to 9:29 a.m. and again from 9:41 a.m. to 10:27 a.m. There was a third "possible private conversations regarding staff medical conditions" video accessed by the "Dan Henery" login on Jan. 24 from 2:49 p.m. to 3:26 p.m. and 3:54 p.m. to 3:59 p.m.

That third log was the day after Dan Henery, Rhonda Surlog and Joann Fischer met to discuss the cameras and audio. That day Henery admitted he accessed everything up in the boardroom.

Supervisors admitted there was even more confusion over who was listening when a report addendum was released by the Special Knox County Attorney David Begley, saying someone was using the system under the login name of "Donna Hayes."

However, Hayes voluntarily quit her employment with the Knox County Sheriff's department on September 13, 2024.

Begley said as the immediate supervisor of Donna Hayes, Sheriff Don Henery had a duty to immediately contact Applied Connective and terminate the use of her computer credentials.

"That was wrong. The Sheriff failed to act when he had a duty to do so," the addendum said. "The County's Employee Handbook prohibits the unauthorized use of county property. An unknown person in the Sheriff's department continued to use the computer credentials of Donna Hayes until Supervisor Marty O'Connor, as a corrective action, terminated Applied Connective and terminated them on August 27, 2025."

Begley said he assumes Hayes did not access the county's computer system after her separation, leaving two remaining scenarios — the credentials were given to someone else or that someone in the sheriff's department used the name of Donna Hayes to mask and hide who was actually accessing the County's video and audio computer system.

"That would have been a devious deception designed to hide eavesdropping and spying on the County Board of Supervisors and other persons using the Board's meeting room," Begley said.

Chairman Jim Sokol said the sheriff "was outraged" that, what he described as a secret surveillance system, allowed "unauthorized observation" in the boardroom without the board's knowledge or that of county employees who used the room for private discussions.

He said that while Nebraska law gives the board authority over budgets and number of deputies, supervision and employment decisions for sheriff's department staff lie with the elected sheriff. In his view, that limits what the board itself can do.

Supervisor Kevin Mladý said the board's concern stems from computer records indicating that certain employees accessed audio and video during closed sessions. He said the archives of closed meetings were viewed. He said one person — the sheriff — was instructed to address the situation internally. "Had he done so, we would not be in this situation," Mladý said, adding that he believes the sheriff should terminate two individuals.

"Our computer logs don't lie," he said.

Supervisor O'Connor said the board was compelled by NIRMA and legal advice to reverse the August terminations, but argued this "doesn't erase the fact" that an additional microphone was installed in the boardroom without the board's knowledge and that someone canceled a privacy switch.

Central to that dispute are the sealed affidavits, which Henery says show that employees listened to closed sessions and other private meetings, and that investigators had to be hired because "people lied." He urged the Legislature to clarify county authority over suspending or firing employees and said taxpayers "deserve better."

Former county Attorney Jensen pointed fingers at county Attorney Begley, who she said prepared the forensic evidence that the board relied upon.

"The fact is, your investigator was coming up empty. He had to do anything he could to come to a conclusion of wrongdoing to justify an eight-month and \$83,824.57 bill. So the easiest and cleanest shot was at Dan Thomas and me," she said. "Begley continues to investigate and try to dig and dig to find anything to destroy his identified targets, me, John Thomas and Don Henery. He continues to try his hardest to prevent the truth from getting into the hands of Knox County residents, all at the expense of taxpayers at a cost of \$835 per hour. Additionally, the inheritance tax funds he used to help taxpayers not to be dipped into for investigations."

The amount of their settlements has not been made public, though the Supervisors said it was paid from the county's inheritance fund and not the general fund.

John Thomas & Sealed Documents

The controversy over courthouse security has grown beyond microphones and system upgrades and evolved into a complex battle over investigative authority, sealed records, transparency and due process.

Central to that dispute are the sealed affidavits, the Attorney General's closed report and the ongoing conflict over who may view them.

Former Deputy County Attorney John Thomas, whose eliminated position was reaffirmed Nov. 26, has repeatedly said the supervisors' actions — including Wednesday's reinstatements and new hire of Kienow and Dan Henery — are due process problems. He said it was "weird" to hear the board rescind its August decisions and then "go on at length" criticizing the same employees it had just reinstated. Thomas said the board continues to operate outside the spirit of Nebraska's open meetings and due process protections, noting the board again refused to allow Jensen to speak on an action affecting her employment.

He also pointed to the criminal investigation overseen by the Nebraska Attorney General's Office, which resulted in March by Judge James Kube, which resulted in no criminal charges. Thomas emphasized that the Attorney General's report itself has never been released — not to the public, nor to the county supervisors, nor to those named in the civil report.

The sealed affidavits became a flashpoint when Thomas formally requested that he and suspended County Attorney Hanna Knox Jensen receive copies. Judge James Kube, in an Oct. 28 order, agreed and said he would unseal the affidavits. He wrote "The First Amendment right of public access traditionally gives the press and the public the right to attend criminal trials and obtain documents, absent an overriding interest of higher value which necessitates closing the proceeding or sealing the documents."

During a hearing on the matter, attorney Eric Hagen said his login was used during the Jan. 22 meeting that even supervisors did not know what the

documents contained. He said the resistance to unsealing stemmed from confusion about what related to the criminal investigation, which the board "knows nothing about." Judge Kube questioned Hagen about why Begley was hired, stating "The board hired Mr. Begley based on his statements, his belief that there was some bad activity going on."

Hagen disagreed, saying Begley and he were hired solely to investigate board concerns about security and privacy. Kube asked Hagen whether Begley had asked to become the criminal prosecutor. Hagen replied, "I don't have a record of that," and when pressed, added, "I believe that is the case."

The affidavit unsealed by Kube — originally filed March 17 — revealed that Begley explicitly requested he be appointed Acting Knox County Attorney, and to hire Hagen as his deputy if the court granted him that authority. Begley also wrote that Supervisor O'Connor told him he would be hired as Special Knox County Attorney to conduct the courthouse security investigation. The affidavit stated: "I am reliably informed by Supervisor Marty O'Connor that the Knox County Board of Supervisors will hire and appoint me as Special Knox County Attorney to pursue an investigation for possible employee discipline and other civil matters." Begley further asserted there was "probable cause" for both civil and criminal investigations into Jensen, Thomas, and Sheriff Don Henery.

Instead of granting Begley's request, Kube approved the Nebraska Attorney General's Office on March 27 to conduct the criminal investigation. On June 2, Assistant Attorney General Sandra Allen filed a notice stating the Attorney General's investigation was complete, stating no criminal charges would be filed and the Attorney General's appointment should be terminated. Judge Kube later ordered that the Attorney General's report be unsealed for public access, once properly filed. Begley said some of the documents were released publicly, that report remains sealed pending an appeal by Begley.

Thomas argued against the appeal, saying Begley misrepresented the timing of the appeal and created "a false impression" that it was filed before Thomas had received the documents from the clerk. Thomas said he received the affidavit after the appeal. Begley further asserted that the clerk provided it before the appeal was filed and Begley's filings were intended to mislead the court into believing Thomas improperly disclosed sealed information.

Begley cited a Nov. 6 Knox County News article as a reason the court should issue a protective order to prevent further public discussion of information from the affidavits. He argued the article demonstrated awareness of the affidavits' contents, awareness of the appeal and its legal consequences, and details "uniquely available" to Thomas at the time.

Thomas rejected Begley's claim, saying the article's contents came from the affidavit he himself obtained after the unsealing order. He said he was attempting to keep critical information out of public view.

The case was set to be heard during last Tuesday's Knox County District Court, but Judge Mark Johnson — who was seated in place of recently retired Judge James Kube — spent less than five minutes addressing it. He explained that both he and fellow district judge Mike Long agreed to recuse themselves due to conflicts with having worked with both John Thomas and Hanna Knox Jensen. The hearing on protective order was then halted and sent to the Nebraska Supreme Court to assign a judge.

"What's going to happen is this court and its companion judge are recusing themselves from this case," Judge Johnson said. "I will tell you the assurance of impropriety will not make it appropriate for this court and for me to sit over it. I have known John Thomas for years, and I have nothing but the highest respect for him. Out of appearance of impartiality, I am declaring a conflict. I have spoken with Judge Long and he is going to declare a conflict. As the presiding judge, Judge Long is going to contact the Supreme Court to see who they may appoint to preside over these matters."

Who Is County Attorney, What's Next?

Jensen was appointed as Acting County Attorney for 31 seconds — until Supervisors finished voting to appoint Danielle Myers-Noelle as Knox County Attorney. Supervisors then voted to terminate Jensen's employment.

However, the county's prosecutorial landscape has changed not only by the board's decisions but also by earlier orders issued by two judges. The county had gone more than a month without a criminal prosecutor for non-felony cases, which resulted in dozens of cases being dismissed and citation fees refunded due to the absence of a prosecutor.

On Oct. 2, Knox County Court Judge Donna Taylor appointed Dan Henery as Jensen's counsel for juvenile, misdemeanor, infraction and mental health proceedings. Taylor wrote that the absence of a county attorney was "dangerous and fiscally irresponsible" and noted that the gap was caused by a decision of the county board. She said she initially believed the board had a plan to fill the vacancy but, after five weeks without an appointment, felt compelled to act.

Under that order, only Judge Taylor can rescind Jensen's appointment for those case types. District Judge James Kube issued a similar order in September stating the Nebraska Attorney's Office will prosecute felony cases.

Supervisors had stated in previous meetings that Myers-Noelle would serve only as county attorney for civil cases. How the board's appointment last week of Myers-Noelle affects the county's criminal prosecution remains a legal and procedural question likely to be addressed by both district and county court judges, as well as what her contract with Knox County states.

As of now:

- Henery and Kienow have been reinstated with settlements.

- Jensen was reinstated, then terminated by the board, but remains under a standing court order to handle certain cases unless that order is rescinded.

- The Nebraska Attorney General's Office remains under a standing court order to handle felony cases unless that order is rescinded.

- Myers-Noelle has been appointed as county attorney by the board.

- Thomas's position remains eliminated.

- Civil lawsuits and related appeals continue.

What Begley's appeal could mean for the "courthouse security issues" with microphones and privacy switches has grown into a far-reaching test of how county government, courts, investigators and elected officials share power — and how they are held accountable.

Since then, Knox County has approved \$83,824.87 in legal fees, along with undisclosed settlements to Dan Henery and Heather Kienow.

KNOX COUNTY NEWS

The Bloomfield Monitor Creighton News Wausa Gazette

Thursday, September 25, 2025

\$1.00 Per Copy

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KNOX COUNTY

No driver's licenses
Due to state staffing shortages there will be no driver's license exams in Center, Hartington, Neligh and O'Neill Sept. 8 through Oct. 3.

LINDY

Jamison performing
B.J. Jamison will be performing at The Lindy Bar n Grill on September 25, at 9 p.m.

CREIGHTON

Homecoming events
Creighton Community Schools Homecoming festivities will start on Monday, Sept. 22. Coronation is Friday, Sept. 26.

BLOOMFIELD

Homecoming set
Bloomfield Community School Homecoming festivities will start on Sunday, Oct. 5 at 6 p.m.

Drive-thru flu shots
The Bloomfield Medical Clinic will be hosting a drive-thru flu shot clinic on October 27 from 4 - 6 p.m.

CROFTON

Homecoming plans
Crofton will celebrate homecoming this weekend, Parade at 2:00 p.m. with Coronation to follow. FB Game vs. Hartington-Newcastle at 7:00

CENTER

Vendor fair set
The Barn at God's Country will be hosting a Fall Vendor Fair on Friday, October 3, from 5-8 p.m. and Saturday, October 4 from 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

ORCHARD

Ribfest, vendor fair
The Orchard Ribfest is on Saturday, Sept. 27 at 5:30 p.m. with the vendor fair starting at 9 a.m. at the Orchard Community Center. They will have a magician at 6:30 p.m.

LEGAL NOTICES

Inside this issue

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- Notice of Estate
- Notice to Contractors
- Board of Education
- Knox County
- North Central PPD

Look For Legals on Pages 3, 8, 10
This newspaper is a legal publication for Knox County, City/Villages of Bloomfield, Creighton & Wausa, Schools, Lewis & Clark WFO, NCPD, State of Nebraska and others.

WEATHER

Friday	Saturday	Sunday
High: 50	High: 65	High: 75
Low: 70	Low: 67	Low: 63
Prep: 6%	Prep: 7%	Prep: 35%

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'No, never seen this'



Typically, the Knox County attorney sits on the right side of the courtroom. But on Friday morning, the one and only defendant sat on that side while his charges were dismissed. After all, there was no one else sitting at any of the tables. On the other side — shown in this photo in the Knox County Courtroom — the table was empty as Judge Donna Taylor said time and again, "Dismissed without prejudice for failure to prosecute."

Cases dismissed, fines refunded with no prosecutor in Knox County Court

By CARRIE PITZER
PUBLISHER

Steve Lefebvre smiled and waved to Judge Donna Taylor as he left the Knox County Courtroom on Thursday morning. With no attorney representing the county, the 47-year-old Niobrara man had his case dismissed.

"You're an awesome judge," Lefebvre said as he opened the swinging door. "I was scared. I was shaking and everything."

Behind Lefebvre as he walked out was an empty prosecutor's table. Knox County has spent the last four weeks without an attorney assigned to cover any criminal matters lower than a felony, leading to dismissed charges and lost revenue for schools and local municipalities who benefit from the fines.

"We're going to return anybody's fine or cost to them with an indication that there isn't anybody available to sign the citation," Judge Taylor said Thursday morning.

Misdemeanors Matter

It's been nearly a month since Supervisors suspended Knox County Attorney Hanna

"We're going to return anybody's fine or cost to them with an indication that there isn't anybody available to sign the citation."

DOONNA TAYLOR
KNOX COUNTY COURT JUDGE

Knox Jensen and eliminated the deputy attorney position. That discipline — along with the firing of Chief Deputy Dan Henry and 911 Coordinator Heather Kenow — stemmed from a breach of privacy report released on Aug. 27 involving courthouse security.

Since that report, there has been lots of activity within the county attorney position, but no one appointed to cover all duties, including the one that sees the most "traffic" in the courtroom — misdemeanors.

On Sept. 10, supervisors temporarily appointed Joseph Smith as special county

attorney with the sole duty of signing cremation permits. The following day, District Judge James Kube signed an order appointing the Nebraska State Attorney General's office to prosecute all of Knox County's felony cases until they have a county attorney. A week later — Sept. 17 — Supervisors appointed Danielle L. Myers-Noelle to handle all civil issues at \$125 per hour.

But as for misdemeanors or citations — from minor traffic violations to the more serious assault, theft or repeat offender DUIs — Knox County has no one to prosecute or file new charges. That oversight was clear Thursday as the prosecutor's table remained empty and case after case was dismissed.

"That was the repeated outcome, beginning with the first case of the day as Judge Taylor gave Lefebvre the unexpected news."

"Dismissed without prejudice for failure to prosecute," Judge Taylor told Lefebvre. "You can go now."

Lefebvre, who intended to request a court appointed attorney, appeared stunned

— See **PROSECUTOR**, page 13

Avera sets record for foundation fundraising

The Avera Foundation set a new annual fundraising record in fiscal year 2025, raising more than \$59.7 million — the highest total in its history.

This achievement was made possible by 21,038 supporters, the most ever recorded in a single year. Among them were 4,206 new donors who made their first gift to Avera, and 3,691 loyal donors who have given for five consecutive years.

The year also included 40 individuals and families who established legacy gifts through planned giving — known as Founders — demonstrating a lasting commitment to Avera's mission of serving the poor, vulnerable and marginalized.

"We are reminded daily that Avera means the world to people. Gifts from our generous supporters help make life better for those we serve, their loved ones and our caregivers," said Dzenan Berberovic, Chief Philanthropy Officer at Avera. "Numerous facilities and programs at Avera simply wouldn't be here if not for our supporters, and for that we are grateful."

Current philanthropy projects at Avera include:

Tomorrow's Promise, a \$50 million campaign to expand and enhance comprehensive care services. This is the largest fundraising campaign in the region to support facility upgrades specifically for women and their families.

The Caring for Life fund supports programs, services and facilities across the Avera footprint, including just-in-time assistance for patients and families including lodging and meals for out-of-town patients.

Light the Way supports behavioral health needs and programs at Avera including suicide prevention, rural access to behavioral health services, 24/7 behavioral health urgent care and more. Generous donations helped provide expansion of behavioral health services at Avera St. Luke's Hospital in Aberdeen, SD, in 2025.

Hospice gifts go toward ensuring that no one must go without comfort and support services at end of life if they don't have insurance coverage.

"Our generous supporters continue to ensure projects like these happen. They see the need and want to help meet that need," Berberovic said. Avera Foundation's annual gratitude

— See **AVERA**, page 13

Santee EMS recognized for pediatric readiness

The Santee Sioux Nation EMS (Santee EMS) was recently recognized by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services for pediatric readiness to provide emergency care for children in Nebraska.

The DHHS Emergency Medical Services for Children program recognizes prehospital providers across Nebraska for advocating for the unique needs of children, ensuring children in our state have timely access to essential medical care, and providing safety, injury, and prevention initiatives.

In 2024, approximately 7.05% of emergency medical transports in Nebraska were pediatric patients, equating 11,513 children. Many of these pediatric patients were treated and transported to rural and frontier emergency departments. Essential skills such as airway management and IV placement have higher complication and failure rates in pediatric

patients compared to adults. Additionally, children have unique physiological, psychological, and developmental needs that are especially relevant in emergencies.

"Santee EMS is committed to ensuring we are equipped and trained to provide high-quality emergency care to children when it matters most," said Jon Sahagun, Santee Sioux Nation Director of Emergency Services. "Prioritizing readiness reduces anxiety and turns uncertainty into effective care."

Santee Health and Wellness Center Clinical Director Phil Jaquith, PA-C, MPAS, MHA, had this to say about the State's recognition, "The Santee EMS program provides essential emergency care to the Village of Santee and the surrounding area 24/7, 365 days per year. Under the leadership of Jon Sahagun, the EMS



COURTESY PHOTO

Santee Sioux Nation EMS (Santee EMS) was recognized by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services for pediatric readiness to provide emergency care for children in Nebraska.

— See **EMS**, page 13

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Sting

- Continued From Page 1

continued to showcase the special relationship built in and around the rivalry.

"They're a really good team," Kuchar said of Crofton, the school with which he and a few other teammates wrestle through a well-developed co-op. "They know what they're doing. Tyson Jackson, he's a great running back, and they're great guys."

Bloomfield finished the night having outgained Crofton 291-225 in the ground game, though the passing game led by Crofton quarterback Preston Foxhoven kept the overall yardage differential much closer. Neither team managed more than two tackles behind the line of scrimmage, and a pair of interceptions off Bee quarterback Preston Foxhoven helped the Warriors win the turnover battle.

Both teams expect to see each other competing for prime placement in the playoffs, though the ideal rematch would come much later, said Ostermeyer. "We'd love to run into them and play for a state championship," he said.

Splits

- Continued From Page 7

and wins in both the blocking and aces categories helped the Cougars overcome a dropped first set to take the next three.

Fletcher was beyond happy with the performance in Thursday's sole match.

"I'm hoping for a whole bunch more wins and a good team atmosphere the rest of the way," she said.

Niobrara/Vergide did come away with one more win in a 1-2 showing in CWC pool play in Bartlett. The Cougars took down Twin Lou in straight sets with another heavy blocking performance from Sucha and Nielsen leading the way. Both of their losses to Archangel Catholic and Chambers/Wheeler Central went the distance too.

Starlet Nielsen finished the week with a pair of double-doubles with double digit stats in digs and assists in both Thursday's Neigh-Oakdale and Saturday's CWC matches.

Dates with West Holt and Bloomfield await the Cougars in this week's slate of competition.

Tuesday, Sept. 16

Table with 2 columns: Team, Score. Rows include St. Ms, NV, Taylor Stark, Taylor Stark, Kara Kucera.

Table with 2 columns: Team, Score. Rows include Starlet Nielsen, Kara Kucera, Taylor Stark, Kara Kucera, Kara Kucera.

EMS

- Continued From Page 1

program has flourished and is fully staffed with multiple experienced paramedics who provide high-quality advanced life support capabilities second to none. When one considers the size of our community, I truly believe our EMS program is one of the best-equipped and staffed programs in the state. Receiving EMSC state recognition is another example of the dedication the Santee EMS program has to the community."

Santee EMS has shown their commitment to excellence in pediatric care by:

- Demonstrating compliance with Nebraska EMS Statutes and Regulations
- Participating in EMSC assessments/surveys as required

Avera

- Continued From Page 1

Report provides more details about foundation work over the past year. This year's Avera Race Against Cancer in May was also a record-setting event, with \$765,000 raised and 7,745 participants. The annual race has raised a total of \$12 million for the past 37 years.

Avera Race events are held in all six regional centers of Avera: Sioux Falls, Yankton, Mitchell, Pierre, Aberdeen, SD, and Marshall, MN. Proceeds go toward complementary therapies such as the arts in healing and mind-body movement classes, wigs for cancer patients, specialized equipment and comfort items.

"We are excited about the future. Our supporters, individuals, families, foundations and organizations - are part of

a lasting legacy that benefits the lives of many," Berberovic said. "Our impact ripples into the lives of every child and adult we serve."

Avera Foundation has been recognized by the Association of Healthcare Philanthropy (AHP) with the High Performer distinction for six years. This distinction represents the top 75th percentile in net returns from fundraising efforts.

The Sisters who founded Avera hospitals and nursing homes were supported by concerned community members who wanted to make a difference," Berberovic said. "That tradition of giving continues. People want to join the Avera mission and ministry. At Avera, every dollar counts. Every gift matters - because it helps people," Berberovic said.

Knox County News advertisement with contact information for 118 N Broadway St, PO Box 547, Bloomfield, NE 68118.

Crofton

- Continued From Page 7

consistently instead of these up and down shifts," Eilers said.

Tuesday, Sept. 16

Table with 2 columns: Team, Score. Rows include Boone, Jaylynn Panning, Jaylynn Panning, Jaylynn Panning, Jaylynn Panning.

Boone 25, 22, 22, 17; Jaylynn Panning 7, 4b; Tyler Cooper 1k, 10d, 22sa; Karoline Schendt 1k, 1a, 1b, 6d, 1sa; Camry Michael 3k, 2b, 5d; Addyson Ostermeyer 12k, 2b, 18d, 2sa; Armana Sprakel 2, 3b, 3d, 1sa; Emma Kuchta 4k, 1b, 10d, 15sa; Jaisie Janssen 15k, 3a, 4b, 14d, 15a; Jazzmyyn Wieseler 1k, 17d.

- Continued From Page 1

and asked for clarification several times. After all, he was facing two Class III misdemeanors stemming from an Aug. 14 traffic stop. Filed by then-county attorney Jensen, she alleged he operated a motor vehicle without a license and did not have registration.

Upon hearing his case was dismissed, Lefebvre said he didn't understand.

"There's no one here representing the state," Judge Taylor repeated. "Your case is dismissed."

She clarified that Knox County does have 18 months to refile charges per the statute of limitations - if a once-appointed county attorney chooses to do so.

First Time For Everything

Despite nearly a quarter century on the bench, Judge Taylor - who was once a county attorney herself - said Thursday was the first time she'd dismissed cases due to not having a prosecutor.

"No, I've never seen this," Judge Taylor said. In 1999, Judge Taylor ran for the Antelope County Attorney. After 20 years there, she applied for a county judge vacancy and was appointed by the governor. She began her judgeship in 2001 and is currently the presiding judge of the 7th District, which covers Antelope, Cumming, Knox, Madison, Pierce, Stanton and Wayne counties.

On Thursday, Judge Taylor dismissed all of the criminal cases on that morning's docket, all except for one - the only case with a victim.

"I'm making an exception on victim crimes. I think victims still need to be protected," she said. "With speeding, there's no identifiable victim. The victim is the people who may be in danger with someone speeding 65 in a 55, but there's no specific person to protect."

In the one case not dismissed, neither the prosecution nor defense appeared in court. Judge Taylor noted that Jerrod Wilcox of Bloomfield did not appear for arraignment. He is charged with assault to cause bodily injury, which is a Class I misdemeanor. He was arrested by Officer Jonathan Hult following the July 5 incident. The complaint was filed by then-Deputy Knox County Attorney John Thomas.

"There is an alleged victim. The court is not comfortable dismissing without prejudice

Prosecutor

Thursday, Sept. 18

Table with 2 columns: Team, Score. Rows include CRO, Jaylynn Panning, Karoline Schendt, Addyson Ostermeyer, Emma Kuchta, Jaisie Janssen.

Saturday, Sept. 20

Table with 2 columns: Team, Score. Rows include Jaylynn Panning, Karoline Schendt, Addyson Ostermeyer, Emma Kuchta, Jaisie Janssen.

- Continued From Page 1

complaints having a victim," Judge Taylor said during court. "A duly appointed county attorney can file a motion and affidavit for an arrest warrant if they determine to proceed with this case. We'll order the defendant to appear Oct. 2 at 10 o'clock, and if there is not someone duly appointed by Knox County to represent the State of Nebraska in misdemeanor criminal cases, then I will appoint by case-by-case basis a prosecutor willing to prosecute this."

But to do so, there must be someone willing to file the role, and that's been difficult for Knox County to find. Supervisors repeatedly said during recent meetings, they have not found anyone willing to handle both civil and criminal cases, which is why they split the duties. But they left out misdemeanors.

No Fine, No Funds

On Thursday, Judge Taylor dismissed eight additional traffic citations - all involved speeding. One also included no operator's license. Knox County Clerk Magistrate Betty Boggs asked how to handle the payments that had been made in those cases, and Judge Taylor said to issue refunds.

"A lot of people made the effort to fill out the waiver and send it in, but we can't accept it until we have it filed. We can't file it until it's signed, so I don't want to tie up their money," the judge and Boggs.

While the court receives fees from those cases heard in Knox County, the fines go to other local entities. According to Article VII-5 of the Nebraska Constitution, fines, penalties and license money is distributed primarily to common schools of the county or municipality where they are levied.

That means the refunded traffic citations were supposed to go to Knox County schools, cities and villages. Adding to the lost revenue, fines for speeding would be significantly increasing - if Judge Taylor could issue them in Knox County. Under LB 530, fines as of Sept. 3 increased for all speed increments, such as 1-5 mph over the limit now costing \$50, up from \$10.

All traffic citations dismissed last Thursday were from Aug. 23, issued by Nebraska State Patrol Trooper Isaac Banks. As of Friday, Knox County had 129 active cases in county court. By Wednesday afternoon, that number increased to 132 cases with 39 pending reviews

Table with 2 columns: Team, Score. Rows include CRO, Jaylynn Panning, Karoline Schendt, Addyson Ostermeyer, Emma Kuchta, Jaisie Janssen.

Table with 2 columns: Team, Score. Rows include CRO, Jaylynn Panning, Karoline Schendt, Addyson Ostermeyer, Emma Kuchta, Jaisie Janssen.

- Continued From Page 1

to be filed, ranging from infractions to Class I misdemeanors.

Legal Deserts

A long-time concern for the Knox County Attorney position is due to the growing number of legal deserts in rural areas. Nebraska is considered to be a severe drought area, according to the Nebraska State Bar Association. Currently out of 93 counties, there are 12 with no lawyers and an additional 18 counties with three or fewer attorneys, making it difficult for the public to access legal services.

The Nebraska State Bar Association established its Rural Practice Initiative in 2013, which connects rural legal employers with law students and lawyers looking for employment opportunities in rural areas of the state. Still, projections show that by 2027, 30 percent of the attorneys in rural areas will be 70 or older.

In Knox County, John Thomas - who had his position eliminated following the breach of privacy report last month - had spent 42 years in the Knox County Attorney's Office. In preparation for his retirement, the county board approved his resignation on Nov. 3 as county attorney effective Dec. 31 and appointed Hanna Knox Jensen from deputy to county attorney as of Jan. 1. Thomas agreed to move into the deputy position and take a 60 percent pay cut while serving the final two years of the term.

That position swap put Jensen, who graduated from Wausa in 2014 and passed the bar in September 2022, in the difficult-to-fill county attorney's role. Supervisors approved the appointment on a 6-1 vote, with only Marty O'Connor voting against the succession plan.

One of four individuals disciplined Aug. 27, Jensen is the only one who has not filed a lawsuit against the county or supervisors. There are currently three lawsuits filed - by Thomas, Henry and Kienow. Each of those three allege the disciplinary action handed down was a violation of the Nebraska Open Meetings Act. On Tuesday, Kienow amended her complaint and named each of the county supervisors individually in her suit.

Knox County Supervisors are scheduled to meet again Wednesday, Oct. 1. The agenda has not been published at this time.

Ford MOODY advertisement featuring various vehicle models like '24 Ford F-150 Crew Cab Lariat, '24 Chevy Silverado Reg Cab, '24 Ford Edge SEL AWD, '23 Ford F-250 Crew Cab Lariat, '23 Ford F-150 Crew Cab, '23 Ford F-150 Crew Cab XLT, '23 Ford Edge SEL AWD, '22 Ford F-150 Crew Cab Lariat, '22 Ford Explorer XLT, '22 Ford Edge SE AWD, '22 Jeep Grand Cherokee Trail Hawk, '21 Dodge Durango GT, '20 Ford F-150 Crew Cab XLT, '20 Ford F-150 Crew Cab XLT, '15 Ford F-250 Crew Cab. Includes contact info for Matt Moody, Alan Kemp, Holly Robinette and website www.moodymotor.com.

59 closed sessions lead to questions

Fifty-nine closed sessions
Forty-one hours.
That is how much time the Knox County Board of Supervisors spent in closed session in 2025.

That number matters. Not because closed sessions are illegal — they aren't — but because they are supposed to be rare. But in Knox County, they've become the norm.

Those 59 closed sessions added up to 2,452 minutes, an average of about 41 minutes each. Every regular meeting and every special meeting included at least one closed session. The July 9 meeting had five.

There were also three emergency meetings. Only one of those did not include a closed session. It was the four-minute Sept. 10 emergency meeting, held solely to appoint a special county attorney to sign creation permits.

When nearly every meeting goes behind closed doors, something is out of balance.

Nebraska law is clear about the intent. Public meetings are meant to be public. The Open Meetings Act starts with a simple principle: public policy is public business. Closed sessions exist, but only as a narrow exception — not as the default way of governing.

They are allowed for specific reasons: litigation strategy, collective bargaining, security matters, criminal investigations, or personnel evaluations meant to protect an individual's reputation. Even then, the law requires a motion, a stated reason and a majority vote.

Most importantly, when the doors close, discussion is all that is allowed. Decisions — real decisions — must be made in open session, where the public can see them happen. That is not a technicality. That is the point.

On Aug. 27, that line was crossed.

At the Nov. 26 meeting, Knox County Supervisors acknowledged they violated the Nebraska Open



CARRIE PITZER
PUBLISHER

Meetings Act when they took action in closed session to terminate Dan Henry and Heather Kienow. Both employees were later rehired. Both matters ended in settlement agreements. The county paid the cost.

That moment is exactly why Nebraska law treats closed sessions cautiously. When decisions happen out of sight, even with good intentions, trust erodes. People start asking questions. Confidence fades.

It can be argued that assuming bad motives. It's about recognizing how secrecy feels to the people watching from the outside. Closed sessions should protect sensitive matters — not replace open discussion.

It can be argued that many of last year's closed sessions involved litigation or courthouse security. It can also be argued that too much taxpayer money is being spent on lawsuits and attorneys instead of roads, services and solutions. Those arguments deserve to be heard.

As Knox County moves into 2026, supervisors have a chance to reset. To treat closed sessions as the exception they were meant to be. To bring more conversation back into the open. To let residents hear the hard discussions, not just the final decisions.

Local government works best when people feel included, informed and respected. Sunlight still matters.

Enjoying Christmas in the Good Life

Christmas is nearly upon us, but in The Good Life, the spirit of the season lasts all month long. You may recall that last year I featured our state's Christmas City of Minden in my Christmas column. Even with more than 12,000 lights illuminating the courthouse dome and town square, Minden's magic extends far beyond its dazzling display. Each year, the community comes together to present The Light of the World Christmas pageant — an impressive culmination of months of preparation and local pride.

The village of Comstock is another beloved holiday destination. With 20 blocks of



DEB FISCHER
U.S. SENATOR

festive displays and hundreds of inflatable, neighborhoods like Grinchville and Snowman's Land make Comstock well worth the visit.

My staff and I also cherish

holiday traditions across the state, from the twinkling Zoo Lights in Lincoln and Omaha, to the living nativity scene in Murdock, to Creighton's Santaland in Bruce Park. From Omaha to Panhandle — whether you're looking to enjoy outdoor art, live music, or hot cocoa — there are countless ways to celebrate the holidays in Nebraska style.

Over the past year, I've reflected often on how our state's values of hard work, service, and family have shaped who I am. Leading up to this holiday season, Nebraskans have worked tirelessly to provide for their families and loved ones — putting food on the table and gifts

under the tree. Many Nebraskans have stepped up to serve their communities through food drives, neighborhood carpoos, and school fundraisers. And as families gather across generations to celebrate together, we are reminded of the values that bind us together.

Whether you celebrate this season at one of Nebraska's many special events or at home with loved ones, please know that I am wishing you a joyful holiday. During this season of reflection, I am especially grateful for the opportunity to serve each of you in the U.S. Senate. I wish you a very Merry Christmas and many blessings in the new year!

Year of delivering wins for the State of Nebraska

Americans elected President Trump and Senate Republicans to get our country back on track. That means safer streets, more money in your pocket, and excellent customer service. I'm proud of the work we did this year. We're delivering for Nebraskans. I continue to do what I did as Governor. I travel the state, talk to people, and listen to their concerns.

This year, I held public events across the state. This included townhall meetings in Central and Western Nebraska. I hosted regular telephone townhalls to answer questions directly from Nebraskans. I hosted a Federal Issues Forum at the Nebraska State Fair in Grand Island. EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin and Senate Majority Whip John Barrasso joined me at the Forum. We discussed solutions to get America back on track. I also released the "Ricketts Review" at the State Fair. This report outlined my work to keep Americans safe, make government work, and deliver proven Nebraska solutions that are ready for America. I released 52 weekly columns. I did 100 exclusive interviews that were seen and heard across our state. I will continue this outreach in



PETE RICKETTS
U.S. SENATOR

2026.

I'm also proud of the legislative successes we achieved this year. We passed the Working Families Tax Cut, which delivered big wins for Nebraska families. This avoided a \$2,400 tax increase. It expanded child tax credits and tax credits for dependent care. It incentivizes businesses to invest in childcare for their workers. It increased the standard deduction while letting donations be itemized. It includes the no tax on tips and no tax on overtime provisions. And we made the Death Tax exemption permanent, so Nebraska farming and ranching families can pass their business to the next generation. The Working Families Tax Cut means 88% of seniors won't have to pay federal income taxes on their Social Security benefits. We created a

\$50 billion rural health care fund to strengthen health care in our rural communities. The Working Families Tax Cut delivers for Nebraska families.

The Working Families Tax Cut provides funding to finish the border wall, hire more agents and more judges. We passed the Laken Riley Act. This was the strongest immigration enforcement law in decades. It closed dangerous loopholes that allowed criminal illegal aliens to hurt innocent Americans. We passed the HALT Fentanyl Act. The HALT Fentanyl Act permanently reclassified fentanyl and its analogues as Schedule I substances. It will lead to harsher sentences for fentanyl traffickers and fewer overdose deaths.

We worked to cut red tape and restore commonsense. We passed the GENIUS Act to support financial innovation. We passed \$9 billion in spending cuts. We passed 24 Congressional Review Act resolutions to overturn burdensome Biden regulations, including stopping Biden's EV mandate. We also passed inclusion legislation I wrote with Rep. Mike Flood to overturn overreach from the Biden Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

At the same time, we overcame unprecedented Democrat obstruction and confirmed President Trump's nominees. We confirmed more than 400 civilian nominees this year. We confirmed President Trump's Cabinet at the fastest pace since 2001. We had more days in session and took more votes than any Senate in at least 35 years. Most Americans show up to work until the job gets done. In some Congresses in the past, that work ethic hasn't existed. Under Republican leadership, the Senate is back to workback to work.

In addition, my team and I delivered excellent customer service to Nebraskans. We helped 883 Nebraskans navigate federal agencies. We cut through red tape. We helped Nebraskans save or recover \$46.4 million. My constituent services team held 736 outreach events in Nebraska this year. This includes Mobile Office Hours in all 93 counties. We will continue providing great services to Nebraskans. We delivered for Nebraskans.

My priorities remain the same. I'm working to ensure your voices are heard. I'm working to address your concerns. We are delivering for Nebraskans.

LETTER POLICY

The Knox County News accepts Letters To The Editor from residents and former residents of the county.

To give an opportunity to the greatest number of writers, no individual's work will be published more than once every 30 days in a publication owned by Pitzer Digital LLC.

Letters to the Editor should be 350 words or less. The writer's name and city are required to be published with each letter posted. We do not withhold names or allow

the use of initials or pseudonyms. Letters must be signed.

Anonymous letters will not be posted, printed or responded to by the Knox County News. Letters must include the writer's name, address and a daytime phone number for confirmation.

We do not publish form letters, poetry, letters written to other publications or letters directed to individuals. Letters longer than 350 words may be run as a paid advertisement and will be advertised as such by being boxed.

OUT OF SIGHT OUT OF MIND



"If once they become inattentive to the public affairs, you and I, and Congress, and Assemblies, judges and governors shall all become wolves."

~ Thomas Jefferson

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- THEME: ON THE FARM
- ACROSS
- 1. Laura Ingalls as You
 - 24. Span of pain
 - 6. Boozer
 - 9. Biblical pronoun
 - 13. Sacred text, to omission
 - 14. "Fat chance!"
 - 15. Afrikanners'
 - 16. Cuke spread
 - 17. Chowed down
 - 18. Clear the scoreboard
 - 19. "Burn chore"
 - 21. John Deere, e.g.
 - 23. Nirvana's "Come as You Are"
 - 25. Broadband access overseas, acr.
 - 28. Mark for someone
 - 30. Recessed space
 - 35. _____ and the Real Girl, "movie"
 - 37. "Shovel"
 - 39. E in baseball box
 - 41. Oil org.
 - 42. A mixture of medley
 - 44. Children's respiratory disease
 - 46. Foggy view?
 - 47. Politicians, for short
 - 48. In a sympathetic manner
 - 50. Ski hill ride
 - 52. Maiden name indicator
 - 53. Bald eagle's nest
 - 55. Repeated Latin dance step
 - 57. "a.k.a. harvester"
 - 61. "Opposite of pasture"
 - 65. "Common Locations" red and white
 - 66. Tall tale poetry
 - 68. Smooth, in manner
 - 69. Audiencis approval
 - 70. _____ at ease
 - 71. Stomach sore
 - 72. Caribou or moose
 - 73. Soldier's bed
 - 74. Harsh

- DOWN
- 1. "Separate cream from milk"
 - 2. Charles Darwin's vessel
 - 4. Form of Japanese poetry
 - 5. Enucleate
 - 6. Deep pile carpet
 - 7. "Cereal grass chickens"
 - 8. Sorority letter
 - 9. Cleopatra's necklace
 - 10. Thermostat option
 - 11. Guesstimate phrase (2 words)
 - 12. Olympic cast-out, e.g.
 - 13. Bridal veil fabric
 - 24. With a jagged margin
 - 26. Must-haves
 - 22. Ribnucleic acid, acr.
 - 24. Fine
 - 25. "Group of this?"
 - 38. "Pasture-raised chicken's morsel"
 - 42. Vanish without notice?
 - 45. Lamentation
 - 49. Japanese capital
 - 51. Rh in Rh disease
 - 54. Indiana Jones' find, e.g.
 - 56. Not a minor
 - 57. For boys and girls beginning
 - 59. Stephen King's "The Green _____"
 - 60. *Male pig
 - 61. Ate Lincoln's hat material
 - 62. Tatted cloth
 - 63. Done
 - 64. Seaside bird
 - 67. UN labor grp.

The Different Types of Public Notices

1. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION NOTICES
allow the public time and opportunity to respond to proposed government action. These notices also fulfill the requirement of "prior notice required for due process of law" found in Federal and State constitutions. Such notices include notices of public hearings, intentions to create new taxation of benefit zones and publication of annual reports.

2. BUSINESS AND COMMERCE NOTICES
are related to government contracts and purchases. Such notices verify that the government is following the principles of equal opportunity and allow the public to verify that the government is not misusing taxpayer money.

3. COURT NOTICES
are prepared by non-governmental bodies. Notices to creditors and claims on probate estates serve as notification to the public and allow time for a response, objection, or assertion of a claim.

The public has a right to know, and publishing public notices in newspapers provide this opportunity. Newspapers function as a neutral third party and are objective in their publishing of public notices.