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**(Neb.)-Top Nebraska Stories For 2012 Include Drought, Wildfires, Election**



By: Roxie Graham-Marski Posted at: 12/24/2012 08:26 AM

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) - A severe, yearlong drought that continues in Nebraska has been voted the top news story of 2012 by newspaper and broadcast members of The Associated Press.

Finishing No. 2 in the survey were the wildfires that blackened hundreds of acres in north-central and northwest Nebraska.

Included in the top 10 list were three stories about the U.S. Senate race won by state Sen. Deb Fischer over former Sen. Bob Kerrey.

Also on the top 10 list were stories about the Keystone XL oil pipeline, Tom Osborne's retirement as athletic director, the drugstore hostage drama in Alliance, the veto override of a bill that restored prenatal care coverage to the children of illegal immigrants, and coverage of the so-called "pink slime" produced in South Sioux City and at other plants.

The top 10 Nebraska stories of 2012, as voted upon by Associated Press newspaper and broadcast members:

1. **DROUGHT:** Farmers, ranchers and residents of some cities struggled through the worst drought in decades, renewing concerns over water usage.
2. **WILDFIRES:** Firefighters throughout Nebraska stayed busy all summer battling wildfires driven by drought conditions and high winds.
3. **U.S. SENATE:** State Sen. Deb Fischer handily defeats former Nebraska Sen. and Gov. Bob Kerrey in their race to replace Ben Nelson in the U.S. Senate.
4. **PIPELINE:** Officials unveiled a new, preferred route for the Nebraska portion of the Keystone XL pipeline. The new pathway was designed to avoid the Sandhills region.

5. OSBORNE RETIRES: Tom Osborne announces he will retire Jan. 1 after five years on the job as Nebraska's athletic director. He'll become athletic director emeritus and stay involved in department operations through July 30.

6. U.S. SENATE-PRIMARY: State Sen. Deb Fischer, of Valentine, defeats two better-known, better-financed rivals to win GOP Senate nomination for U.S. Senate.

7. U.S. SENATE-KERREY: Ex-Sen. Bob Kerrey announces he will seek Democratic nomination for a Nebraska U.S. Senate seat, three weeks after saying he wouldn't run.

8. DRUGSTORE STANDOFF: Andres Gonzalez took a pharmacist hostage during a botched drug robbery in downtown Alliance. The 27-year-old wounded three officers and the pharmacist during the daylong standoff that ended with his death. During the standoff, he admits to killing two people.

9. PRENATAL CARE: Lawmakers overrode Gov. Dave Heineman's veto of a bill that restores prenatal care coverage to the children of illegal immigrants and other low-income women.

10. PINK SLIME: News erupted in March over so-called "pink slime" made by Beef Products Inc. in South Sioux City and other plants. BPI sued ABC News in September for defamation over its coverage of a meat product called lean, finely textured beef that critics dub "pink slime."