

# the Charleston Gazette

THE STATE NEWSPAPER — OUR 140TH YEAR

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## Gainer, state officials in Visa ads

### State Ethics Act limits endorsements; auditor to ask video be pulled

By Eric Eyre  
Staff writer

The state Ethics Commission has made clear that public officials in West Virginia shouldn't appear in advertisements for businesses and their products.

But that hasn't stopped state Auditor Glen Gainer and four state agency administrators from taking part in an online Visa advertising campaign.

Gainer, two Department of Environmental Protection directors, the Division of Highways' deputy secretary and a West Virginia University purchasing

official tout the state's Visa purchasing card, or "P-card," program in three online promotional videos.

Gainer's office contacted the state Ethics Commission Friday after the Gazette started asking questions about the auditor's appearance in Visa's ads.

Gainer was unavailable for comment last week, but his spokesman said the auditor would direct Visa to remove the videos from its website today and ask the state Ethics Commission for a formal advisory opinion on the matter.

"The State Auditor's Office be-

lieves in maintaining the highest ethical standard," said Justin Southern, a spokesman for Gainer. "Although we believe that no violation has been made, our office will request an opinion by the Ethics Commission, and ask that the West Virginia purchasing card information be taken down pending that decision."

Ethics Commission Executive Director Theresa Kirk would not say whether the commission is investigating the state officials' appearance in Visa's videos.

"We aren't authorized to confirm or deny if there is any such

investigation," Kirk said. "Our doors are always open to public servants on how a cause of action applies to past opinions on the state Ethics Act."

Gainer and the other state officials said they weren't paid to appear in the Visa video spots. West Virginia state government has a \$432 million purchasing card contract with Visa. Gainer's office manages the program.

In one video, Gainer remarks, "Visa's been an outstanding business partner ... working



"Visa's been an outstanding business partner... working with us to better meet the needs of our vendors."

GLEN B. GAINER III West Virginia State Auditor

Glen Gainer will ask Visa to take down videos from its website in which Gainer lauds the company as part of a Visa advertising campaign. The screen caption reads, "Visa's been an outstanding business partner ... working with us to better meet the needs of our vendors." — Glen B. Gainer III West Virginia State Auditor

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## FIGHTING POVERTY WITH FITNESS



KATE LONG | Gazette photos

Every Mingo County school is weaving more physical activity into students' daily activities. During music class, Lenore K-8 third-graders do modified yoga stretches to music before more vigorous musical exercise.

## Mingo effort boosts attendance, test scores, discipline

By Kate Long  
Staff writer

IN 2010, Mingo County Schools Superintendent Randy Keathley took a hard look at the facts. Thirty two percent of his fifth-graders had high blood pressure, according to West Virginia University screening, and 35 percent were obese.

Twenty-seven percent of second-graders were already obese. More than 80 percent of all students qualified for free or reduced-price lunches. "It threw us," said Keathley, a Williamson native. "It caused us to refocus our attention. Hungry or sluggish kids don't perform well."

Mingo's academic achievement was well below the state average, and the absentee/dropout rates were



County schools chief Randy Keathley, a Williamson native, came to the school wellness coordinators' January meeting to say "the job you're doing is really important," given the high level of student poverty, high blood pressure and obesity. "Hungry or sluggish students can't concentrate," he said.

above state average. In the past two years, Mingo schools have launched a system-wide wellness campaign. "Our children deserve no less," Keathley said. "Research tells us, the lower the

income, the worse children's health and achievement is likely to be." Many studies show that, the lower the income, the higher the probability of diabetes and obesity. Mingo already has the

state's highest hypertension rate and almost a 40 percent obesity rate, "so what we're doing will affect the future," Keathley said.

"We expect substantial results over time," he said, "but we're already seeing enough results to know we're on the right track."

Between Sept. 1 and Feb. 1 of this year, there were 195 fewer out-of-school suspensions system-wide than there were in the same time period the year before. "Disciplinary referrals have dropped sharply," Keathley said.

Mingo's Westest scores rose in reading and math after the first year of the wellness program, especially at the elementary level. Elementary proficiency scores rose 8.1 percent for all students in reading and 14.4 percent for all students in math.

Mingo's dropout rate was cut in half in the past year, moving them from above the state average to below the state average.

SEE MINGO, 13A

## Budget battle mudslinging doesn't let up

By Philip Elliott  
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House and Republicans kept up the unrelenting mudslinging Sunday over who's to blame for roundly condemned budget cuts set to take effect at week's end, with the administration detailing the potential fallout in each state and governors worrying about the mess.

But as leaders rushed past each other to decry the potentially devastating and seemingly inevitable cuts, they also criticized their counterparts for their roles in introducing, implementing and obstructing the \$85 billion budget mechanism that

could affect everything from commercial flights to classrooms to meat inspections.

In West Virginia the cuts could include:

■ Military: About 2,000 civilian Department of Defense employees would be furloughed. Army base operation funding would be reduced by about \$1.4 million.

■ Seniors: West Virginia would lose about \$160,000 in funding to provide meals.

■ Teachers and schools: West Virginia would lose about \$5.8 million in funding for primary and secondary education. About 80 teacher and aide jobs would

SEE BUDGET, 13A

## Multifest to rebound, festival's director says

By Kate White  
Staff writer

Embarrassment over an embezzlement scandal, which threatens to cripple Multifest, is driving the event's board members to clean house, the festival's executive director said.

"It's very important for us to show our transparency and let our sponsors know we're going to do things the right way," Vicky Keene said Sunday.

Board members met Saturday night to discuss the importance of transparency and running the festival as

a company, Keene said.

Last month, Deborah Starks, wife of former Multifest director Stephen Starks, pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court to tax fraud. Deborah Starks, who handled much of the financial activity for the festival, admitted that she embezzled more than \$300,000 from Multifest between 2005 and 2010.

The festival board cut ties with the Starks, hired accountants Gray, Griffith & Mays to supervise finances and have scheduled weekly

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## DNR proposes changes in bear-hunting season

By John McCoy  
Staff writer

West Virginia wildlife officials want to change 2013's black bear hunting season dramatically, but they don't want to change the antlerless-deer season much at all.

A parade of Division of Natural Resources biologists outlined the proposals at Sunday's quarterly meeting of the state Natural Resources Commission, the panel that sets hunting sea-

sons and bag limits.

Under the proposals, bear-hunting regulations would be significantly more liberal than in recent years.

The largest change would come in the state's mountain counties, where firearm bear seasons have been restricted to the month of December since 1977.

If the proposed regulations are approved, bears could be hunted with

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# MINGO

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■ The county's attendance rate rose three points to 96 percent.

"We haven't really substantially changed anything else, so I would say it's the wellness program," Keathley said. "Talking with our principals, it's evident that the overall atmosphere of the schools is changing. I would say students are feeling better about school and enjoying it more."

Mingo County has become one of five West Virginia school systems recognized by the USDA's Healthier U.S. School Challenge, which promotes "excellence in nutrition and physical activity."

How are they getting those results? They're making changes on several fronts:

They're beefing up after-school physical activity and added several sports: volleyball, golf, track and soccer.

"Counties like Kanawha already have those, but they're not common in southern West Virginia," he said.

With help from the state Office of Child Nutrition, all cooks were trained to cook healthier meals from scratch. Mingo adopted the universal free breakfast program and doubled the number of students eating breakfast. They serve a fresh fruit or vegetable snack every afternoon through a federal program for low-income elementary schools.

Teaming up with the Mingo County Diabetes Coalition, they started a running/walking program in middle schools. Every eighth-grader got a pedometer and a 10,000-steps-a-day challenge. They ran/walked their own 5K. "We hope to spread this program to all grades," Keathley said.

"The collaboration with the community groups has been phenomenal, because students are getting healthier messages in school and out of school," he said.

Every Mingo school also joined the Healthy Schools Program of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. That's a free national program that includes 158 West Virginia schools, sponsored by the Bill Clinton and Robert Wood Johnson Foundations.

The program helps schools plan next steps for their wellness program and give teachers workshops and materials for four years.

As part of the Healthy Schools program, each school now has a wellness coordinator who organizes ongoing activities for kids and teachers.

"It's an important step beyond the wellness council," Keathley said, "Someone is responsible for making it happen."

## You can see it happening

On a recent Friday at Mingo's Lenore K-8, about 60 kids were rocking out on the stage with several teachers, no partners, boom box blasting, constant motion, shifting easily from the Macarena to The Twist to the Wobble. Every five minutes or so, the music segued. So did the kids.

"They love it, dancing through the decades," said principal Sabrina Runyon. "We teach them the moves, and they go at it!" In the gym, other students shot hoops and ran relays. One group was



KATE LONG | Gazette photos

**ABOVE:** Every Friday, for the last 45 minutes of the week, students choose activities as a reward for responsible behavior. One of the most popular: Dancing through the Decades.

**RIGHT:** Sabrina Runyon, Lenore K-8 principal, sends each class outside or to the gym for 18 minutes of a 47-minute lunch period each day. "If we can do that every day with 600 students, any school can do it," she said. Nick Nelson, eighth-grader, shows appreciation.



"Talking with our principals, it's evident that the overall atmosphere of the schools is changing. I would say students are feeling better about school and enjoying it more."

RANDY KEATHLEY

Mingo County Schools superintendent

training for a 5K.

It was Fun Friday, last period every week, Reward Friday for students who make it through the week with less than three violations in any class.

Instead of candy or objects as rewards for responsible behavior, they choose activities like free time in the gym, shooting hoops or running relays with their friends, or dancing with a teacher who teaches them cool dance moves.

"This works better than any reward system we've ever had," principal Runyon said. "We make it so much fun they don't want to miss it."

The reward system is part of the schoolwide wellness program. "We're weaving physical activity through the whole week now," she said. "We've been doing it more than a year now, and we see the benefits. When kids stir their brain cells by moving, they focus better and perform better."

"Our discipline problems are also way down since we started this." Last year, 47 violations were reported in January. This January, only two violations were reported. "We feel the extra movement lets them release energy they would

have spent acting out," she said.

She shifted the schedule to get the kids moving more:

■ Lenore now serves universal free breakfast and cooks from scratch. For 18 minutes of the 47-minute lunch period, all students go outside or to the gym in bad weather. "If we can pull that off with 600 students, any school can," Runyon said. "It's a matter of making a schedule and sticking to it, like a well-oiled machine."

■ Kindergarten through 4th grade get another recess during the day, so younger kids get two activity breaks.

■ Teachers cannot take away recess as punishment. "Lots of times, a misbehaving kid just needs to get up and run around." Instead, they get a violation, the loss of a class trip or party, or if necessary, a visit to the office.

■ Runyon often plays a "Jammin' Minute" over the PA system first thing. Sleepy kids stand beside their desks and stretch and move. "Teachers do that kind of thing all day too."

■ Music classes involve movement: modified yoga, physical learning activities to music.

When the wellness coordi-

nators from the various schools met in January, Superintendent Keathley came too. "I'm here because I want you to know how important I think your wellness job is," he told them.

Amy File, state program director for the Alliance for a Healthy Generation, listened as each school described their activities. Some listed teacher wellness activities too.

"We've got 17 teachers signed up to run the Hatfield-McCoy Marathon," said Lenore's Pam Chapman. "The kids are impressed."

"I see a big, positive difference in just in a year," File told the coaches. "When we first started, you were organizing one-day events, like the Cupid Shuffle. This year, I'm hearing about things that go on week after week. I'm hearing about teachers as role models."

File gave all the coaches a new DVD of quick classroom exercises. "The Alliance is always giving us useful stuff, and it costs us nothing," said Kay Maynard, Mingo wellness coordinator.

Wellness coaches, existing staffers, get paid an extra \$250 a year from excess levy funds. "Obviously, we don't do it for the money," Chapman said. "I'm a believer."

"We get a whole lot of value for that little bit of money," Keathley said. "Our excess levy lets us do the after-school activities and have the wellness coaches," he said. "We're very thankful for that, because it's working."

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# MULTIFEST

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meetings to turn things around, according to Keene.

"There's no room to take a breath," she said. "After work [board members] are putting all of their time into Multifest — a lot of officials are on the phone until one-thirty, two in the morning."

"We're doing whatever it takes for Multifest to get back up and running."

The summer festival, held on the state Capitol grounds, relies mostly on corporate sponsorships. The city of Charleston and the Kanawha County Commission have also provided support.

But many sponsors, in light of the embezzlement, haven't said for sure if they plan to continue giving money.

"We've talked to the commission, and we're in the process of making appointments with Toyota and trying to get around to all of our sponsors," Keene said.

Saturday, board members

found the organization's by-laws and reflected on the significance of the event.

"We dug through old things ... myself, I didn't even know bylaws existed," said Keene, who has been on the board for 15 years. "There's nothing else like Multifest in West Virginia — it's something that caters to the masses, not only black people or only white people, whatever nationality you may be."

"We have to make sure it's brought back correctly."

Community members are encouraged to attend meetings to plan this year's festival. There's a meeting at 7 p.m. today at the Golden Corral in Cross Lanes, Keene said. Also, there's room for three additional board members.

"I told everyone at the meeting last night, if you think you want to become part of the board I'm more than happy to interview you, but we have to make sure you're fit," Keene said. "We can't allow what happened before to happen again."

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# BUDGET

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be at risk. The state also would lose \$3.6 million in funding for about 40 teachers, aides, and staff who help children with disabilities.

■ Environment: West Virginia would lose about \$2 million in funding for clean water, air quality, and prevention of pollution from pesticides and hazardous waste. The state also could lose \$488,000 in funding for fish and wildlife protection.

■ Head Start: About 500 children would lose Head Start and Early Head Start services.

■ College: Aid would be provided to about 200 fewer low income students to help them pay for college. Funding for work-study jobs would go to about 60 fewer students.

■ Public safety: West Virginia would lose about \$96,000 in grants for law enforcement, prosecution and courts, crime prevention and education, corrections and community corrections, drug treatment and enforcement, and crime victim and witness initiatives.

■ Job search assistance: West Virginia would lose about \$247,000 in funding for job search assistance, referral, and placement. About 9,230 people would be affected.

■ Public health: West Virginia would lose about \$430,000 in funding to help prevent and treat substance abuse. The state also would lose about \$177,000 in funding to help improve its response to infectious diseases, natural disasters and other public health threats. A \$62,000 cut in funding to the Department of Health and Human Resources would reduce the number of HIV tests by about 1,600. West Virginia also would lose about \$52,000 for vaccinations for children, including measles, mumps, rubella, tetanus, whooping cough, influenza, and Hepatitis B.

■ Domestic violence: West Virginia could lose up to \$39,000 in funding to provide services to domestic violence victims.

The GOP's leading line of criticism hinged on blaming

Obama's aides for introducing the budget trigger in the first place, while the administration's allies were determined to illustrate the consequences of the cuts as the product of Republican stubbornness.

Former Republican National Committee chairman Haley Barbour, aware the political outcome may be predicated on who is to blame, half-jokingly said Sunday: "Well, if it was a bad idea, it was the president's idea."

Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., said there was little hope to dodge the cuts "unless the Republicans are willing to compromise and do a balanced approach."

No so fast, Republicans interjected.

"I think the American people are tired of the blame game," said Sen. Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H.

Yet just a moment before, she was blaming Obama for putting the country on the brink of massive spending cuts that were initially designed to be so unacceptable that Congress would strike a grand bargain to avoid them.

Obama nodded to the squabble during his weekly radio and Internet address.

"Unfortunately, it appears that Republicans in Congress have decided that instead of compromising — instead of asking anything of the wealthiest Americans — they would rather let these cuts fall squarely on the middle class," Obama said on Saturday, in his last weekly address before the deadline but unlikely to be his final word on the subject.

With Friday's deadline nearing, few in the nation's capital were optimistic that a realistic alternative could be found and all sought to cast the political process itself as the culprit. If Congress does not step in, a top-to-bottom series of cuts will be spread across domestic and defense agencies in a way that would fundamentally change how government serves its people.

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has said the cuts would harm the readiness of U.S. fighting forces. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said travelers could see delayed flights.