

Freeze threatens Fla. crops

By Tamara Lush
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

FROSTPROOF, Fla. — Here's something you don't often see in this town at the heart of the state's \$9 billion citrus industry: a sign at the public library that says, "ICE! On sidewalk. Be careful!"

Growers were scrambling Monday to assess damage and pick as many oranges as possible from thousands of acres of citrus groves.

Trucks filled with fruit rumbled through the center of town all day as their drivers rushed them to juice plants.

Freezing temperatures that sweep in on an Arctic front from Canada have been plaguing the state for a week, with several areas approaching or breaking records on Monday.

The cold is extremely tough on the state's fruit and vegetable growers, with crops such as citrus trees and sugar cane suffering damage when exposed to temperatures below 28 degrees for more than 4 hours. It was below 28 degrees more than 8 hours overnight in the agricul-

ture-dominated area around Lake Okeechobee.

"Temperatures have been ridiculous cold for South Florida," said Eric Hopkins, vice president of Hundley Farms Inc. in Belle Glade on the lake's southern edge. He estimated his farm would lose about \$750,000 in green beans and sweet corn because of the cold. "We survived a couple of the nights, but this weekend sort of finished us off as far as the sweet corn and green beans go," he added.

Overall crop damage tallies won't be available for days or weeks, agricultural officials said. But the state Department of Agriculture said there has been "significant crop damage" throughout the state, from tropical fish farms near Tampa to the ferns grown in Volusia for filler in Valentine's Day bouquets. Strawberries were also affected.

The state's largest citrus grower's group has been receiving reports of frozen fruit and damage to trees' leaves and branches, but it's not clear yet if those trees have suffered long-term damage. Frozen fruit must be rushed to a processing plant



John Raoux/Associated Press
Ice covers oranges during the early morning hours at Showcase Citrus groves in Clermont, Fla.

or the flavor could be ruined. Complicating efforts to assess the damage is "the sheer number of cold days we had in a row. I can't remember anything like it," said Michael W. Sparks, executive vice president and CEO of Florida Citrus Mutual.



Al Grillo/Associated Press
Fox News announced Monday that Sarah Palin, 2008 Republican vice presidential candidate, accepted a position as a political commentator.

Fox hires Palin as commentator

By Rachel D'Oro
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Sarah Palin, former Alaska governor and 2008 Republican vice presidential candidate, will return to her broadcast roots and take her conservative message to Fox News as a regular commentator, the cable channel announced Monday.

"I am thrilled to be joining the great talent and management team at Fox News," Palin said in a statement posted on the network's Web site. "It's wonderful to be part of a place that so values fair and balanced news."

Fox said according to the multi-year deal, Palin will offer political commentary and analysis on the cable channel, as well as Fox's Web site, radio network and business cable channel.

She also will host occasional episodes of Fox News' "Real American Stories," a series debuting this year that the network said will feature true inspirational stories about Americans who have overcome adversity.

"Governor Palin has captivated everyone on both sides of the political spectrum and we are excited to add her dynamic voice

to the FOX News lineup," Bill Shine, executive vice president of programming, said in a statement.

Palin, 45, is hugely popular with conservatives and has more than 1.1 million Facebook followers.

She stepped down as Alaska governor in July, 17 months before the end of her first term in office and less than a year after she vaulted to overnight fame as John McCain's running mate.

The bombshell resignation stunned even supporters and fueled widespread speculation on her next career step — with predictions ranging from seeking the presidency in 2012 to hosting a conservative talk show.

She told Barbara Walters in November a 2012 presidential bid was not on her radar but added she wouldn't rule out playing some kind of role in the next presidential election.

Since resigning, Palin has had colossal success with her best-selling memoir "Going Rogue," released four months after she left office. She finished a nationwide tour in December after hitting some of the political battleground states from the 2008 election and drawing thousands of fans.

Trial may become abortion forum

Scott Roeder shot a late term abortion provider during a church service in Kansas last May.

By Roxana Hegeman
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

WICHITA, Kansas — On a balmy Sunday morning, Scott Roeder got up from a pew at Reformation Lutheran Church at the start of services and walked to the foyer, where two ushers were chatting around a table. Wordlessly, he pressed the barrel of a .22-caliber handgun to the forehead of Dr. George Tiller, one of the ushers, and pulled the trigger.

As his premeditated, first-degree murder trial begins Wednesday, no one — not even Roeder himself — disputes that he killed one of the nation's few late-term abortion providers.

But what had been expected to be an open-and-shut murder trial

was upended Friday when a judge decided to let Roeder argue he should be convicted of voluntary manslaughter because he believed the May 31 slaying would save unborn children.



Roeder

Suddenly, the case has taken on a new significance that has galvanized both sides of the nation's abortion debate.

Prosecutors on Monday challenged the ruling, arguing such a defense is not appropriately considered with premeditated first-degree murder when there is no evidence of an imminent attack at the time of the killing, and jury selection was delayed. A hearing was scheduled for this afternoon to give the defense time to respond.

"The State encourages this Court to not be the first to enable a defendant to justify premeditated

murder because of an emotionally charged political belief," the prosecution wrote. "Such a ruling has far reaching consequences and would be contrary to Kansas law."

With secret jury selection proceedings stalled, the key questions are now being asked outside the courtroom: Will the judge's decision embolden militant anti-abortion activists and lead to open season on abortion providers?

Does the Justice Department plan to file charges against Roeder under draconian federal statutes guaranteeing access to clinics?

And what does it all portend for the unfolding case itself and the inevitable legal challenges to the nation's abortion laws?

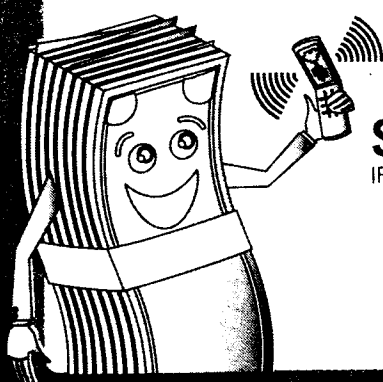
Roeder, 51, of Kansas City, Missouri, has admitted to reporters and in a court filing that he killed Tiller.

The prosecution stands ready with more than 250 prospective witnesses to prove it.

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