

CROWD

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He wanted to talk about a new bill concerning the death penalty, but it was clear the crowd had other ideas about what was going to be talked about.

Rep. Faber told the group that even though he was no longer on the state School Funding Committee, he was familiar with how school finances work, and knew the concerns communities are having over the cuts.

He didn't think there would be additional cuts in education and health care, however, that didn't solve the state's financial dilemma.

"The news is not good, but the 'bleeding' has slowed down," he said.

He added that he knew that some were in favor of a 1-percent sales tax increase and he said that it was funding cuts that would make the real difference in making ends meet. He added that over 26,000 could lose their jobs due to a sales tax increase. In addition, Kansans that live on the east side of the state travel the short distance to Missouri to buy food and other items where there is no sales tax.

Rep. Faber explained there was a free service provided by the state to school districts. A post-audit that could assist schools in locating areas where cuts could be made and adding that he was disappointed that no one within his district asked for the service.

This comment received a lot of attention. It was echoed throughout the hall that there was no such thing as a "free service," and that tax payers end up paying big bucks for those specialists coming to do the assessment.

St. Francis Superintendent Rob Schiltz added that the figures which were being handed out at the meeting were misleading. He said that the state's figures calculated the money used for repairing school buildings, retirement funding and money sent to the service center in Oakley. When the state's budget is figured, the money used to refurbish the state capitol building is not included with the payroll.

The state, he said, instead of directly paying the Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center in Oakley as it used to, now sends that money to the schools which, in turn, pay the service center. The employees' retirement money (KPERs) is electronically deposited in the schools account and that same day, electronically withdrawn.

It isn't our money, Mr. Schiltz said. It is making the school's budget look far better than it is and this money is being used to give incorrect information to the public.

"You send us funding then turn right around and take it back," he said.

Lea Keller, St. Francis, said she was concerned about the decisions made in the state's capital. Legislators want the community's

businesses to grow, she said, yet, schools, hospitals, and assisted living are the businesses here and the state is cutting the funding to sustain them. In addition, the major employment field in Cheyenne County are teachers and nurses.

Wheat and corn crops, and cattle put Kansas on the map and the state legislatures should make it their business to keep western Kansas here — instead they want the communities to survive on shoestrings.

We have tried to be fiscally responsible but, she said, the state government didn't run out of money over night. If we need to raise taxes — so be it!

"I urge you to fight for us," she said. "If we need to make an appearance on the Capitol steps, then we will be there!"

From this point, three questions were posed to the legislators:

- Kansas is facing a \$400 million shortfall. What is your plan as an elected official to address this situation?

- How do you expect local services, schools, hospitals, nursing home to survive?

- A 1-cent sales tax increase would generate substantial revenue by many; funding the cuts locally would put the short-fall on few, especially in western Kansas. Which of these are you more likely to support?

Rep. Faber answered that the Appropriation Committee will be taking next year's budget to the House to be voted on. This will decide whether there will be further cuts or raise taxes. The 2010 budget is already set and cannot be changed.

"We are making it by the skin of our teeth this year," said Rep. Faber. "There will probably be a flat budget and few cuts, but not to education or medical."

Sen. Ostmeyer added that the state is in a dilemma, especially since accepting the federal bailout money. He said that has to be paid back some time and how many times do we need to raise taxes to do that.

"Vote us out in 3 years if we are not doing the job," said Rep. Faber.

Rick Reeser, former Good Samaritan Village administrator, said the government needed to reduce expenses and increase revenue. He suggested the state government should reduce the number of employees. He added that if the communities have to cut back, the state government needs to do cut backs also. Rep. Faber said the only recent job growth in Kansas was in governmental jobs.

Mr. Reeser added that it is a tremendous strain in the medical industry to have a fire marshal inspect a nursing home facility and require the replacing of a \$15,000 exhaust hood over the kitchen stove because a seam was not sealed, and then say there are going to be funding cuts.



LEGISLATORS, Rep. John Faber, above, and Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, right, had lots of questions to answer at the town meeting held in Bird City on Saturday.

Herald staff photos by Casey McCormick

Mr. Reeser continued by asking where is the logic in having to pay for the fire marshal when the county fire chief can do the same thing.

Barbara Antholz, Cheylin staff, asked the legislators about the suggestion of looking to combine classes of less than 25 students. The schools, she said, are already on a tight budget. Does this mean students are going to be bused to Hays?

"You both need to stand up for the little people, we are important, too," she said.

After receiving three years of funding cuts to the developmental/handicap services, is the state going to reopen state institutions? asked Bonnie Burr, member of the Northwest Kansas Developmental Services. She added that it would be more expensive to open state institutions to accommodate the needs in Kansas.

"Goodland is asking for a \$1 million grant to replace the bricks on Main Street, I hope you don't vote for this and instead send the money to Developmental Services," she

said.

Cheylin Superintendent Bruce Bolen was at the microphone and told the crowd that Cheylin has a prudent board of education, great staff and teachers and the supplemental fund cannot pay staff and the problem begins when the school makes their budget based on the funding the state says it will provide, then starts cutting — it hurts because there can be no planning.

Last year, the state cut \$20,000 in July, after the budget was made and approved. Then another \$75,000 was cut in November.

Mr. Schiltz said the St. Francis schools lost \$240,980 in state money last year. There have been 7.3 teaching positions, one administrator and six assistant coaching positions cut in the last few years along with the other smaller cuts. The board, he said, does not want to cut programs or staff.

Terry Miller, county clerk, said he had been asked by other clerks to ask Rep. Faber why he had voted to take away all or part of the taxes collected on cell and land-line phones.



These taxes, Mr. Miller said, have helped the county establish the 911 dispatch center and furnish radios, pagers and other necessary equipment.

Mr. Faber said that wasn't what the bill had stated. Mr. Miller countered, saying if that was the case, then there were a lot of clerks and other people across the state who had misinterpreted the bill.

Mr. Faber said it was possible that he had not completely understood the bill.

Mr. Miller later said the bill, Senate bill 48, if it had passed would have allowed big telephone companies (Sprint) to get their hands into the "pot." Mr. Faber was one of 15 voting to take away the funding. There were 106 voting against it.

Janelle Bowers, Cheyenne County Emergency Medical Service

director, said she was shocked to learn that ambulance runs were cut \$93 a run for 2010. People, she said, don't want to wait 30 to 60 minutes for an ambulance to pick them up. If the state forces small ambulance services to close, the ambulances will be coming from Goodland or Colby.

It was clear to the legislators that Cheyenne County residents wanted some answers and they wanted to be heard.

Larry Kramer, St. Francis, said he was on a fixed income and didn't feel that he could afford a tax increase, even if it was only a penny.

"We have a voice, and we are not here to kill the messenger," said Dr. Mary Beth Miller. "Everyone here has a stake in this county and you should represent us."

New Physician Helps Keep Patients Closer to Home



Help has arrived for those patients in Western Kansas suffering from kidney disorders. This summer Hays Medical Center hired its first in-house nephrologist, Johanna "Joni" McCullagh, M.D. The addition of Dr. McCullagh, medical director of the Nephrology Center program, means advanced kidney care is now available for patients closer to home.

Dr. McCullagh and the Nephrology Center staff provide a variety of services, including caring for patients with:

- Kidney failure
- Hypertension and hypertensive kidney disease
- Diabetes and diabetic nephropathy
- Inflammation, scarring or hardening in the kidney
- Cystic kidney disease (polycystic)
- Inflammation of blood vessels in the kidneys
- Kidney stones

- Management of dialysis patients, transplant patients and those with end stage renal disease

One of the biggest benefits of this addition to Hays Medical Center is that the hospital now has greater capacity to care for patients in need of regular dialysis. While the hospital previously treated dialysis patients, they can now treat more patients — and patients who need a higher level of care — eliminating the burden and stress of travel for additional families in the area.

Dr. McCullagh, a Wichita native, grew up in Kansas City and completed her education

at the University of Kansas School of Medicine. She completed both her residency in Internal Medicine and her fellowship in Nephrology and Hypertension at the University of Kansas Medical Center.

Dr. McCullagh is certified by the American Board of Internal Medicine and holds memberships with the American Society of Nephrology, American College of Physicians and the American Medical Association.

Wanting to stay within driving distance of family and friends, Dr. McCullagh and her family were excited to make the move to Hays.

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spends their career in education would not be a good candidate because we are all about raising taxes.

"That is a long way from being accurate!"

Mr. Cassidy believes that everyone should do everything possible to maintain communities without raising taxes.

At the town meeting on Saturday, Mr. Cassidy said Les Lacy, Cheyenne County Hospital administrator, did a great job of stating how all the entities in a community are woven together — when one gets hurt, they all get hurt.

Mr. Cassidy has been in education for 40 years, working six years as a teacher, 16 years as a counselor and 20 years as a principal.

Being in education, I can think of several ways we can cut state costs, Mr. Cassidy said.

"To me, that is the solution — everyone working together to solve problems," he said. "We need to preserve our lifestyle and after exhausting every other means, if it is necessary to raise taxes, then so be it!"

As a representative, Mr. Cassidy is asking those living in Northwest Kansas for input on how issues and new bills would affect them.

"I have many farmer, business and medical friends that have great knowledge and would always be willing to help," he said. "The key is input from Northwest Kansas people — not lobbyists and special interest groups.

"If we don't all stand up to protect our Northwest Kansas way of life, we will have to take what is

dished out."

He is asking the people to come to the polls in August and November.

"I want to see the largest turnout in the history of our five counties," he said. "Then, maybe the legislature will take notice."

We have the best people and a lifestyle that we have worked hard for, he said. Let's fight to keep it that way!

Mr. Cassidy earned a specialist degree in education finance from Fort Hays State University and a master's in administration and counseling from Northwest Oklahoma State University.

He has served on numerous boards including: Kansas State High School Activities Association Board (3 years), Board of Secondary School Principals (8 years); board member for State Access for Handicapped Students, St. Francis Fire Department and was on the board of directors for Riverside Recreation, St. Francis. He was named Area Principal of the Year (1989). He was a motivational speaker (1991-2000), Colby Community College Outreach instructor in education (6 years); Fort Hays State Outreach instructor, taught school and community relations and current educational issues (6 years).

Mr. Cassidy and his wife, Gloria, who is first grade teacher, have two daughters: Jenny and husband, Cory Busse, who is a farmer; and Penny and husband, Kody Krien, who is a businessman on St. Francis' Main Street. They have six grandchildren, Tate, Cassidy and Ben Busse, and KC, Adam and Ellie Krien.

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