

# The House

## Sebelius hoping to solve school mess

By Veronica Monier  
Norton Telegram

Doug Sebelius knows if he's elected, he'll have some major problems to face in the state House of Representatives, but he thinks he's up for the challenge. The Norton lawyer will meet incumbent John Faber in the Republican primary on Tuesday, Aug. 3, for the House seat in District 120. The winner will face Democrat Bob Strevey of Norcatur in the general election Tuesday, Nov. 2.



D. Sebelius

tourism and get all of the departments working together to see that Kansas' diversity of resources is put to good use.

Western Kansas needs to make sure to keep up with telecommunications, he said, because that might be the way to snare some state jobs. Jobs that are done in Topeka can be done in western Kansas with the right resources, he said, and telecommunications also helps small businesses to stay on top.

"We need to promote industry out here and not over-regulate small businesses," he said. "We need to keep small towns attractive, and we can certainly help local communities on the state level by giving them the resources that they need — good education, training and bringing an idea out into reality."

Mr. Sebelius said the state needs to be concerned with water policy. He said a good, sound, long-term water policy is critical, because nothing will kill a rural area like not having water.

Because irrigation rights have been seriously over-appropriated, the state is going to have to begin to retire some water rights, and at the same time, help farmers to adjust.

He said the underground aquifer is going to disappear if something isn't done to start conserving water. Cities, in addition to farmers, will suffer for the lack as it gets more expensive to find water.

"You can't make water," he said. "The aquifer is a tremendous resource, but we have to realize that we've allowed overusage of it and it isn't being replaced. If we lose that, we lose out on all counts, including keeping western Kansas an attractive place to live."

"I don't want to act when there is a crisis. The Legislature can facilitate this. Water policy has got to have top priority, like public education."

Mr. Sebelius said the state also needs to fight the antitrust battle to keep small farmers in business, look into alternative sources of energy such as solar and wind power, stop passing problems down to local governments, and be more efficient with spending. He said he would not vote to raise speed limits, because he feels higher limits would cause problems, such as an increase in vehicle fatalities.

Mr. Sebelius is an attorney in private practice as a partner in Sebelius and Griffiths LLP in Norton and is serving his 24th year as Norton County attorney. He and his wife Nancy have two children.

## Faber says schools top of his priorities

By Karen Krien  
The Saint Francis Herald

Rep. John Faber says school finance is among his top priorities.

He said he had found the whole "school finance mess" to be frustrating, especially in the last few years of his two terms serving the 120th District in the Kansas House of Representatives.

During the last legislative session, he said, there were three plans proposed, including a last-minute proposal to borrow \$94 million from the state's Transportation Fund which would have to be paid back. It would have given schools some money, he said, but that plan, along with the others, did not pass. When the session ended, there was no more money going to schools, though there were no cuts in school funding.

Following the May 7 end of the session, he said, legislators learned of a \$65 million windfall of taxes paid to the state. He said that Gov. Kathleen Sebelius said she had not known about it until then, but Rep. Faber said he thought that had it should have been reported earlier. It would have certainly helped fund schools, he said.

He thinks that, in the fall, the governor might call a special session to discuss school finance. A lot might depend on what the state Supreme Court rules in a case where a district judge has ordered the state to come up with \$1 billion more for schools.

Rep. Faber said he worries that if legislators are required to come up with a new school finance formula, it could be devastating for small rural schools like those in his district.

"Right now, sales, income and other taxes from Johnson County are funding schools across the state," he said. "In a new formula, they will want counties to fund their own schools and, in northwest Kansas, there are not the property and sales tax dollars."

Rep. Faber said he wants to keep the rural schools open.

"When schools are closed, the community dries up and blows away," he said.

A five-generation farmer, Rep. Faber said he is concerned about the farming economy, realizing how important it is to this area. One problem he sees is the increasing dominance of big corporations

"There needs to be more competition in the marketplace," he said. "We need to break up big corporations like the Cargills and IBPs and go back to the smaller corporations. There just isn't the competition."

He also sees the rising costs of gasoline in much the same light.

"There isn't enough competition," he said.

He said that when the price of gas started going up this spring, it was because a company closed one of the big refineries on the

West Coast, and supply and demand pushed the price up.

Rep. Faber said he supports ethanol-blended gasoline, where a type of alcohol made from grain is mixed with gasoline, and said there are more ethanol plants being built across Kansas.

He thinks the wind farms would do well in northwest Kansas, where the wind generally blows every day. Unfortunately, he said, there are no adequate transmission lines to carry power out of this area. If a company would come to this area to install the wind farms, he said, they would expect to be subsidized and, not being a member of the Utilities Committee, Rep. Faber was not sure just how they would accomplish this.

"I think this area would benefit from the wind farms. Sen. Stan Clark worked especially hard to bring the wind farms to northwest Kansas," he said.

He said there are several on the Utilities Committee from western Kansas, but losing Sen. Clark, who was killed in a traffic accident in May, could be a big loss.

He said he sees the population dwindling and businesses dying throughout much of northwest Kansas, and the area has an older population.

"We need to get small manufacturing and other businesses to come to this area," he said. "In southwest Kansas, there are packing plants, but we don't have those in northwest Kansas. We need small manufacturing businesses like the gasket place in Goodland, which may grow into a larger business. These types of businesses can attract other such businesses."

Rep. Faber said he would like to see the speed limit on Interstate highways go up 5 to 10 miles per hour.

"All the states around us have higher speed limits," he said.

Health insurance is a main concern of people across the United States, as well as Kansas. Rep. Faber said that it is a federal problem as well as state and, if the bills to Medicaid insurance keep going up, "it is going to gobble up the whole state's budget!"

"We need to start by lowering the malpractice insurance that doctors pay," he said, "and we need competition to drive the prices down."

"I am against socialized health medicine. Instead of paying for insurance and medicine, we will be paying higher taxes to pay for the health care."

He suggested that Kansas could get an insurance pool organized, but to do that, they would have to fight the insurance industry and state agencies.

"There is just no 'free lunch,'" he said.

John and his wife Renee live south of McDonald. They have three sons, Josh, Jerry and Jake, and four grandchildren. The Fabers are members of the Lutheran Church.



John Faber

## Strevey believes in two-party system

By Kimberly Brandt  
The Oberlin Herald

Hoping to give people a choice, Bob Strevey, a retired teacher and military man, has pitched his hat into the ring for the 120th District state representative seat once again.

Mr. Strevey, 61, a registered Democrat, said he believes in the two-party system. By running, he said, he would like to help strengthen the Democratic Party in the area.

He said he has always been interested in state government, and that is part of the reason he is running. Mr. Strevey ran for the seat two years ago, but lost to the Republican incumbent, John Faber, who is running again this year.

Mr. Faber will meet Republican Doug Sebelius of Norton in the primary on Tuesday, Aug. 3, then Mr. Strevey will go against the winner.

Mr. Strevey said he is in good health, with several retirements under his belt, and time to take part in the Legislature.

The candidate serves on the board of the U.S. 36 Highway Association and is president of the Norcatur Citizens Alliance.

As a retired teacher — he worked the last year as a volunteer at the Norton Correctional Facility — Mr. Strevey said he feels the school system is missing an important part — the responsibility of the child. People talk about "leaving no child behind," he said, but until the responsibility is put on the child to learn, and kids accept that and want to be educated, things can't change.

As far as money for education goes, said Mr. Strevey, he thinks Tim Peterson (the Democratic candidate for the state Senate in District 40) had it right in his comments at a candidate forum in Oberlin last week: This problem needs to be solved in Topeka. He said he agrees with Mr. Faber when he said the Legislature had failed.

People in office in Topeka didn't get the job done, he said.

The school money issue lies with the Legislature, said Mr. Strevey. A judge should not be able to come in and put requirements for spending on the school system.

Education, said Mr. Strevey, is a service industry. He said he thinks some of his fellow educators have forgotten that they need to provide what the public can afford.

Mr. Strevey said he would favor raising taxes to pay for education, but only if it was necessary.

Another issue the area is dealing with is economic development, which Mr. Strevey said isn't a new problem. He said he can remember, when he was a high school stu-

dent in Norcatur, drawing a chart on the population trends. Decatur County has been going down since 1900, he said.

"This is a long-term problem," said Mr. Strevey, "and it needs a long-term solution."

What is happening in smaller communities in western Kansas is a reflection of what is happening in larger towns, he said. Big agriculture is running out the small farmers, he said.

The government farm program was meant to help keep small farmers on the land, said Mr. Strevey, but government policy has changed. Now government is helping run out the small farmers.

In the city, he said, businesses get breaks and aren't paying property tax, yet farmers are having to pay property tax even when they aren't making any money off their crops.

"We have to restore health to the agricultural area to remain growing," he said.

If the drought continues, he added, he would like to see a property tax moratorium or a suspension of it.

Mr. Strevey said he is in favor of anything that will bring additional industry to the area, including developing wind farms.

Three steps need to be taken, he said. The first is that they need to work on improving the highway system, second, promote tourism and third, put in place a program to help young farmers get started.

Mr. Strevey said niche farming, growing specialty crops such as organic produce, could be important.

He said people need to be convinced to conserve our scarce water. People should plant more buffalo grass, which doesn't need much water, in their lawns. The water source is overcommitted, he said, and that needs to be cut back.

There needs to be a sense of priority of where water should go, Mr. Strevey said. It needs to be protected. One thing the state could do is help irrigation farmers get back to dry land farming.

Mr. Strevey lives outside of Norcatur on the family farm. He and his wife Kay have three daughters, Trudi, Wendy and Hollie.

The candidate served in the Army and Army Reserves, retiring in 1992 as a lieutenant colonel. He also taught for 31 years in area towns including Norcatur, New Almelo, Selden, Park and the Norton Correctional Facility and he still farms and works as a volunteer at the prison.

He said he plans to get out and shake hands and campaign before the election. Depending on who wins the primary, he said, he may have to change his strategy a little.

In the end, though, Mr. Strevey said, all the candidates are all winners because they are getting people involved in the political process.



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# The Senate

## Youth may give advantage in race

By Tom Betz  
The Goodland Star-News

A Goodland man was the first to announce for the District 40 State Senate seat seven months ago, and he is working hard in the final weeks before the primary election to win.



Dan Rasure

We caught up with Dan Rasure, 22, a 2001 graduate of Goodland High School, Saturday morning while he was riding in a fair parade in WaKeeney, and interviewed him while he drove on to the next parade in Grinnell.

Mr. Rasure opened a campaign office at 1011 Main in Goodland in January, and has been busy traveling around the 40th District and meeting people. He is seeking the Republican nomination for the seat.

"We have driven 32,000 miles so far," he said. Following the parade in Grinnell, he was headed to Oakley, then to Scott City, there was a barbecue in Dighton and then on to Ness City for the final stop of the day.

The Senate district has grown by three counties this year, and Mr. Rasure sees that as a good thing.

"I like the addition of the three new counties," he said. "It brings a new emphasis on oil and gas exploration which we have in the district, and the correctional satellite facility in Stockton which they want to expand."

Mr. Rasure served internships for Congressman Jerry Moran and Sen. Sam Brownback while finishing his bachelor of business management at McPherson College last year. Graduating in December, Mr. Rasure decided to come back to Goodland and work with his parents, Kevin and Christie Rasure, at the family business, Rasure's Do It Center.

When he announced for the Senate seat held by the late Stan Clark, R-Oakley, Mr. Rasure said he felt it was time for a change after 10 years.

"We have seen declining population and I felt it was time to stop that," he said. "While Clark had many positive points, he had been there for 10 years and I felt it was time for a change."

Mr. Rasure said he believes his youth is more of an advantage, and that his enthusiasm is an asset.

"I think being young is an advantage," he said, "because people want to see the young people get involved and know that we need that type of enthusiasm to help keep people in northwest Kansas."

Asked to compare himself to his Republican opponent, Rep. Ralph Ostmeyer of Grinnell, Mr. Rasure said he thinks he knows the education system better.

"I understand the education system and how important it is to the area," he said. "If we don't have a change we may see as many as five districts close in the next year or two. There are many in trouble like Quinter, and there have been large cuts in Oberlin."

"Ostmeyer is part of the problem as he has been on the education committee for years and his solution has been 'let it rain, and everything will be all right.'"

"We have seen droughts and times of rain, but the population continues to decline, and our schools are in trouble now."

"I think agriculture is important, and always will be in our area, but we need more to bring people to our cities and counties."

Looking at the school finance situation Mr. Rasure says it is time for the hard decisions.

"We need to make a commitment that nobody leaves Topeka until they get something done," he said. "We have not seen anything in four years, and the legislators have gone home saying they cannot solve it."

"The property taxes keep going up, and I don't feel this is a good way for local people to have to pay to keep the schools open."

"I believe we need a statewide plan, and that we probably only have a year or two to convince the representatives from Johnson County that they should support a statewide school finance plan."

If there needs to be a tax increase to solve the school finance problem Mr. Rasure would support it, but it is not his first choice.

"I have been very frustrated because my opponent has said one week he would approve a tax increase, but the next week he says he will not," Mr. Rasure said. "He signed the tax pledge saying he would not increase taxes, but has broken it in his voting in Topeka."

"I would not sign the tax pledge because I feel that is a closed-minded way to approach tough decisions an elected person faces. The idea that 'we can fix it next year' is what has gotten us into trouble."

The drought has hurt farmers, banks and downtown businesses, and Mr. Rasure said he believes it is a good time to push economic development.

"We need to make sure we are not overtaxing people and work to keep as many here as possible," he said. "Economic development is one of those things where you have to spend some money to bring the business to the area."

"We can grow some of our own, but ... it seems to me ... the state should take a more active role in helping small business, like we have in tourism."

Talking about the costs of agriculture leads to the subject of water.

"We are always going to be concerned about the aquifer," Mr. Rasure said. "We don't know what we have, but we do know what the drops in water level are ..."

"We need to be sure we are using water efficiently. We don't want to see northwest Kansas run out of water. It would be devastating to our whole area if the wells begins to dry up."

"I am not in favor of Sen. Brownback's proposal to buy water rights back," he said. "I know a lot of people would do it, but I think it would take a money out of our area."

"We have an older farming base, and I don't want to see them cash out because it is good for them and not leave the younger farmer an option."

Looking at Kansas 10 years from now, Mr. Rasure said he has a vision of progress and stores opening and schools having to expand.

"I have a vision that we are seeing stores open and schools having to hire teachers because the population is increasing," he said. "It is a nice vision, but it is going to take a lot of work to get there."

"We have to start today, pulling ourselves up and helping each other. We need to work together."

"Being young, I can bring a perspective to the Legislature that is not there to let people know that there is a good life in northwest Kansas. Part of that is diversification and relying on more than agriculture."

## Democrat will be on ticket on Nov. 2

By Patty Decker  
Colby Free Press

Born and raised in Oakley, Tim Peterson is the only Democrat vying for the 40th Senate District seat that came open following the death of Sen. Stan Clark in a dust storm last May.



T. Peterson

With Republicans Ralph Ostmeyer of Grinnell and Dan Rasure of Goodland battling it out, Mr. Peterson won't know until after the August primary who his challenger will be.

He said he hadn't planned on running for the Senate, but plans changed when Mr. Clark was killed earlier this summer.

Mr. Peterson has served as the chair for the First District Democrats since 2001 and was its treasurer from 1995-2001.

Mr. Peterson said his top priorities will be school finance and health care issues. When asked if he believes school in Kansas will start this fall, despite a district court order in Topeka, he said, "Of course. The Kansas Supreme Court knows the importance of schools."

Admitting that the problems with school finance didn't happen overnight, he said, it isn't something that will be fixed overnight either.

As for any increases in school finance and where the money will come from, Mr. Peterson said he will not support unnecessary taxes.

"There are two important questions that must be answered," Mr. Peterson said. "First, can we make more dollars available for the classroom by streamlining administrative costs? and second, are there areas in our state government where we can reallocate money to be used by schools?"

Mr. Peterson said he isn't convinced that the state needs to raise taxes.

"If taxes must be raised," he said, "I will not support any legislation that raises property taxes."

With respect to health care and the state's role in the current situation, Mr. Peterson said he believes the state should work to lower the cost of health care and help expand the prescription drug program.

"Our senior citizens should not have to choose between medicine and food," he said, "and the cost is also forcing middle class families to gamble on their health care needs. This is not right."

Proper health care should be provided to everyone, he said, and that can be done without socialized health care plans.

A great potential for jobs in Kansas would be to look at economic development based on value-added industries, he said.

"Likewise, we have only begun to tap our tourism industry in northwest Kansas," Mr. Peterson said. "We must work together as a northwest Kansas region to develop our tourism industry, and that will take leadership that I will try to provide."

Closer to home, Mr. Peterson said he believes people in this area are concerned with the survival of their families.

"We want the best for our children and our older parents," he said, "and we want to keep our towns safe and healthy."

Kansas is the best place to live and he wants to see it stay that way.

Mr. Peterson said he thinks we must encourage development of ethanol alcohol plants and other agriculture-related industries.

"The increase demand for grain by ethanol plants raises the local grain prices," he said. "A few cents per bushel increase in the local price of grain translates into millions of dollars to be circulated locally."

There are no easy solutions in keeping people farming, he said.

"Structural changes to agriculture have turned farmers into managers," he said, "and smaller profits per acre have forced farming operations to become larger."

Mr. Peterson said, the best thing the government can do regarding the drought is to provide needed services as efficiently as possible to keep taxes low.

"I will support efforts by Kansas State University to develop new crops and new varieties of old crops," he said.

The Peterson family farms land east of Page City, in northwest Logan County, grow wheat, milo, corn and sunflowers on 2,800 acres.

With the state budget still in the red, Mr. Peterson was asked what the Legislature should do.

"I believe that administrative cost for state government should be the same as any well run business or charity," he said, "and that is, around 3 to 5 percent of the total budget."

"I don't think we have reached this objective, and if economic factors change, we must be prepared for worst-case scenarios."

Another economic development issue Mr. Peterson believes is critical is the state's highways. He said the state must continue its highway program, which he said is critical for economic development in northwest Kansas.

He said he would support raising the speed limit.

"Everyone is driving faster than the speed limit anyway," he said, "and this doesn't encourage respect for laws."

Mr. Peterson and his wife Rebekah have two children, ages 12 and 10. His educational background includes a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Kansas with a major in geography and quantitative methods (statistics). Two years ago, he became nationally registered as an emergency medical technician and serves with the Logan County Emergency Medical Service.

He is the past chairman of the Farm Service Agency state committee and currently serves as the vice-chair of the Kansas Agricultural Remediation Board. Mr. Peterson was appointed to the board by Gov. Kathleen Sebelius and confirmed by the Kansas Senate in January.

## Ostmeyer weighs in on several issues

By Tisha Cox  
Colby Free Press

Ralph Ostmeyer of Grinnell gave up his seat in the state House of Representatives to run for the 40th District Senate seat this fall.



R. Ostmeyer

Rep. Ostmeyer, 61, had filed to retain his seat as representative for the 118th District, but withdrew to run for the Senate seat that had been filled by Oakley resident Stan Clark after his death two months ago.

Rep. Ostmeyer and Goodland Republican Dan Rasure will face each other in the primary election Aug. 3, then the winner will go up against Democrat Tim Peterson of Monument.

Having just completed his second term in the House, Rep. Ostmeyer said he is giving up his seat to run for the Senate because he feels a conservative needs to continue on in the 40th District seat to protect the interests of northwest Kansas, help reinforce traditional family values and to take a stand on issues like school funding.

By e-mail, Rep. Ostmeyer answered questions about his stance on issues ranging from school finance and economic development to water issues and transportation.

On the issue of school finance, Rep. Ostmeyer said he supports "adequate funding" for kindergarten through 12th grade education for all students in Kansas with as little of the money as possible coming from the property tax.

"I would hope the Kansas Legislature would develop school finance legislation which provides for minimal reliance on the property tax for support of public elementary and secondary schools," he said. "Schools will open this fall, and the money is already budgeted."

He said taxes shouldn't be raised. As soon as the economy takes a turn for the better, he said, he'd like to see some cuts restored in the state budget. Those would include demand transfers, money the state usually gives back to cities and counties for property tax reduction. Rep. Ostmeyer said it was one of the first things cut when the state hit budget troubles and it needs to be restored to higher levels to help local governments.

On economic development, he

said, cities, counties and development directors need to get involved to "create a business-friendly atmosphere and have incentives to encourage new businesses to relocate to western Kansas."

Rep. Ostmeyer said he is in favor of alternative energy sources.

"I support wind farms and ethanol production," he said. "I helped pass tax incentives my first term for ethanol production."

Rep. Ostmeyer also said farmers don't need any new regulations tossed their way.

"This new 2004 economic development act will address some of the problems in western Kansas," he said. "I have always supported diversified farming and most farm issues are solved on the federal level."

Water was another issue he weighed in on.

"The state is currently working on water issues," Rep. Ostmeyer said. "We need to make sure generations to come have access to water. We must conserve."

He touched on transportation and health care. Rep. Ostmeyer said he supported the 2004 transportation plan and he said rail service needs to be protected, which would help save wear on roads.

He doesn't support increasing speed limits in the state because he thinks people are already driving too fast.

Rep. Ostmeyer said the state must find ways to control health care costs or it will "consume the total state budget in the future."

"Socialized health care is not the answer," he added.

As far as issues in northwest Kansas are concerned, Rep. Ostmeyer said he thinks the most pressing issues are protection of the ground water supply, money for local government and trying to stem population loss in the region.

"When I talk about local government, that includes cities, counties and schools," he said.

Rep. Ostmeyer and his wife Kay have seven children and 13 grandchildren. A fourth-generation farmer, Rep. Ostmeyer and his wife farm with their oldest son Terry.

He is a member of Immaculate Conception Church of Grinnell and enjoys spending time with his grandchildren and working on antique cars.

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