



# COLBY FREE PRESS

## City bracing for influx of detour traffic

By **PATTY DECKER**

*Free Press Editor*

The westbound lanes of Interstate 70 between Colby and Levant will undergo reconstruction beginning next week as part of the state's 2002 highway improvement project, said Chriss McDiffett, with the Kansas Department of Transportation in Norton.

As the transportation department gears up for this first phase, which is expected to take about four months, Colby officials said they too are preparing for the detour in the city.

"Beginning Monday," said Gerry Bieker, City of Colby public works director, "interstate traffic will be diverted at Exit 53 to Range Ave. (Highway 24)."

From there, traffic will continue north to the junction of Fourth St. (Highway 24).

Interstate traffic will then turn onto Fourth St. (Highway 24) and proceed to the Levant interchange where it will return to Interstate 70.

"We just can't imagine what to expect once the detour goes into effect on Monday," said Bieker.

One of the city's major concerns is possible traffic congestion from the National Guard Armory to the stoplight at Fourth and Range in the mornings and when school dismisses around 3 p.m.

"It would help traffic congestion if our local people could avoid using Fourth St. during those busier times," Bieker said, "since spring and summer Interstate travel will be considerably higher."

In a worst case scenario, Bieker said the city might also consider adjusting the timing on

stoplights at College Dr. and Range Ave. and Fourth St. and Range Ave. allowing a longer wait for Range Ave. and shorter for the side streets to avoid backing up local traffic.

City officials are urging parents to remind their children to be extra careful walking to and from school in the Range and Fourth St. area once the detour begins next week.

Once the first phase is completed, the Kansas Department of Transportation will begin its second portion of project, which will be the eastbound lanes from Levant to Colby.

In the current plan, the eastbound traffic would then be routed along the same detour in the opposite direction until early October.

Officials here noted that should the routed traffic result in too much congestion within the city, the detour could fail requiring other avenues to be explored.

Additionally, McDiffett wanted to remind everyone to use caution in construction zones and that fines double within those areas.

For questions, call McDiffett in Norton at (785) 877-3315 or Bieker at (785) 462-4420.

## Colby College board, faculty alliance to air negotiation disputes

By **PATTY DECKER**

*Free Press Editor*

An impartial examiner will be hearing unresolved issues between the Colby Community College board of trustees and the Colby College's faculty alliance on Thursday, beginning at 10 a.m. in the Fireside Lounge at the student union.

The meeting will be a fact-finding session with Art Veach, a federal mediator from Wichita, allowing both sides to discuss issues separating them from contract ratification.

At this time, the college faculty and board have not agreed on a contract for the current school year and no contract was ever ratified the year before.

The trustee's negotiating team consists of Kenton Krehbiel and Ken Poland, board members, with Bob Overman, Wichita, representing their con-

cerns. The faculty alliance is represented by Bob White in Hays University Service office.

Prior to fact-finding, the college board offered a 40-plus page counter-proposal to the alliance, which has been presented to the bargaining unit.

During the two years that both groups have tried to reach an agreement, the major stumbling block has been in salary and insurance.

As long as the faculty alliance and college board remain at impasse, the 1999-2000 contract remains in place.

The college board and faculty met six times in April and May to try and reach agreement for the 2001-02 school year.

The fact-finding session is open to the public and so is an earlier meeting at 9 a.m. when the college board will also be talking about negotiations.

## State's winter wheat crop faring poorly

WICHITA (AP) — Stressed by drought and disease, the 2002 winter wheat crop may see losses as disastrous as last year — when Kansas farmers destroyed more than 1 million acres of their crop before harvest, a Kansas State University wheat specialist said Tuesday.

Most of the damage is in southwest Kansas, said Jim Shroyer, a Kansas State University Extension wheat specialist.

"People are going to be making tough decisions on whether to destroy their fields or not: 'I can destroy it, hope it rains, and plant a row crop or — instead of destroying the wheat — I can hope it rains and keep the wheat,'" he said.

Kansas farmers will have to make that decision by late April if they still

hope to plant another crop in time on those fields, he said.

"It is a little early to write it off," he said. Only 24 percent of the Kansas wheat was in good to excellent condition, Kansas Agricultural Statistics Service reported this week. Another 34 percent was rated as fair.

The agency said 26 percent of the crop was in poor shape, and 16 percent in very poor condition.

KASS also reported 64 percent of the state's wheat acres had no winterkill.

Drought conditions prompted Kansas farmers to abandon 1.6 million acres of the 2001 winter wheat crop, although late spring rains salvaged the remaining crop.

There is still time for the crop to recover, if it rains soon.

## National official visits Colby VFW's positive effect on towns emphasized

By **MAXINE NELSON**

*Colby Free Press*

Ray Sisk, national senior vice-commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and who will become national commander in August, visited the Colby VFW Post Tuesday on a tour of the state. Sisk, of Bakersfield, Calif., was traveling with Dick Clutts, commander of the Kansas VFW.

Sisk is in Kansas as part of a membership roundup and to thank the members for what they were doing for the organization. He said the VFW and Ladies Auxiliary consist of 2.7 million people.

"VFW has a positive effect on communities with projects such as the Voice of Democracy contest, youth essays and Boy Scouts," he said. "During the last five years, the Ladies Auxiliary has donated \$3 million to cancer aid and research," he said. "The VFW has donated \$2.7 million...they have put in over 6 million hours, volunteering to help committees and hospitals. In rural communities, especially, the VFW and Auxiliary provide service to veterans, widows and orphans," Sisk said.

Sisk pointed out that every post home has a service officer, and district officers are trained on the national

Dick Clutts in Colby on Tuesday. The visit was part of a statewide tour to introduce himself to local members.

level, and pass that training on to the local level.

He praised the veterans for their past service, and said he admired those currently on active duty.

Sisk stressed that the VFW wants to be sure the veterans keep their entitlements when they get out of service. "We are concerned about the VA benefits being shut down, especially the VA hospitals nationwide," he said. "We feel veterans are entitled to these benefits."

Sisk said the VFW and Auxiliary would like a country as devoted to patriotism all the time, as they have been during the last few months. "Our de-

sire is to teach young people about patriotism and the flag," he said.

Sisk said Gov. Bill Graves signed a proclamation designating U.S. Highway 83 as Veterans Memorial Highway. The VFW will pay for signs on the highway with the designation, he said. According to Sisk, several other states had so designated the highway, and plans were underway to make it a Veterans Memorial Highway from Canada to Mexico.

From Colby, Sisk was going to Dodge City and Liberal, and other locations in southwest Kansas, as he makes his way to Kansas City.

## House begins debating tax proposals; one bill rejected increased shortfall

By **JOHN MILBURN**

*Associated Press Writer*

TOPEKA. (AP) — House leaders can scratch income tax increase off their list of potential sources of new revenue for solving the state's budget woes.

In fact, the House approved an income tax bill Tuesday that would make the state's revenue shortfall worse by \$1.4 million. The 75-47 vote sent the measure to the Senate.

The bill would give about 6,900 low-income senior citizens a tax credit equal to a percentage of their property tax bills.

"We're a long way from solving the budget crisis," House Speaker Kent Glasscock, R-Manhattan, said Monday, following a debate on the measure.

Glasscock said it would take some time to educate members about the seriousness of the state's nearly \$680 million budget shortfall and the need to find realistic solutions. The problems weren't solved in one day, he added.

"But we have started the debate," he said.

The 125-member chamber is scheduled for a week's worth of debate on tax policy, intended to identify which

method of raising new revenue has the most support. Passage of legislation requires 63 votes in the House and 21 in the Senate. Monday's focus was income tax, with Tuesday to be devoted to property taxes, Wednesday to sales taxes and Thursday to alcohol and tobacco products. The 115-7 defeat of the day's only proposal to raise the income tax rate summed up the House's opposition to new taxes. The plan would have increased the rates for taxpayers filing single and married returns, generating \$93.2 million in fiscal 2003, which starts July 1. Opponents said the increases targeted middle-income

Kansans who earn \$30,000 to \$60,000 and file joint returns, or \$15,000 to \$30,000 and file as singles.

"This amendment is too much money and the approach is unfair," said House Taxation Chairman John Edmonds, R-Great Bend.

Glasscock said he was not surprised nor disheartened by the day's outcome. "I never thought that income tax day was going to get very far out of the starting blocks," he said.

The entire process was not without skeptics.

House Minority Leader Jim Garner questioned the merits of having the

entire House debate policy that should be addressed at the committee level first.

"It doesn't seem to be a very productive exercise," said Garner, D-Coffeyville. He said the reluctance of Democrats to support new taxes stems from a desire to see where the money will be spent and what cuts will be made in the budget. During the debate, the House amended the bill to allow taxpayers to dedicate a portion of their anticipated refunds to elementary and secondary education.

Similar to the "Chickadee Check-off" for migratory birds, Rep. Brenda

Landwehr, R-Wichita, said the "kiddie checkoff" would allow Kansans, who say they are willing, to pay more taxes to support education. Another Landwehr amendment would allow tax refunds to be set aside for in-home health care services.

Budget analysts said the amendments would cost as much as \$200,000 in printing costs for new documents.

Other amendments, including one to make Daylight Saving Time the official time of Kansas, failed. A House ruling found the amendment, sponsored by Rep. Ted Powers, not relevant to taxation.

## Briefly

### Weather: Drizzle, fog

The National Weather Service has pulled off the rain thing in its forecast issued this morning for the Colby region. Here is how the next few days look now: tonight, cloudy, drizzle, fog, lows in the middle 30s and east winds 10-20 mph, turning to the northeast; Thursday, drizzle and fog early, mostly cloudy, cooler, with highs only in the middle 40s, north winds brisk at 15-25 mph; Thursday night, cloudy, lows in the lower 20s; Friday and Saturday, partly cloudy, highs Friday in the upper 40s and in the middle 50s on Saturday, with lows in the upper 20s to around 30. Colby's high Tuesday was 72 and the overnight low this morning was 30. The soil temperature at the 4-inch depth is averaging 41 degrees.

Precipitation remains at 0.01 inches for the month. The records for March 13: 78 in 1946 and 2 in 1951. *(The daily temperatures, precipitation and records are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)*

### Family historians to meet

The Family History Group will meet 3:30-5 p.m. Sunday at Jean (Mrs. Paul) Wagoner's home, 1795 E. 4th, to view her research. Anyone interested is welcome to attend. Bring questions for sharing.

### Park fee reminder issued

Thomas County Clerk Tracey Perkins reminds that park

fees will be going up April 1. If there are questions, contact her office at 462-4500.

### Fair board to meet Thursday

The Thomas County Fair Board will meet at 8 p.m. Thursday in the 4-H Building to discuss plans for the coming fair, and to conduct routine business. The meeting is open to the public.

### Walkers to meet Thursday

There will be a short informational meeting for the Walk Kansas program Thursday from 12:10 to 12:50 p.m. at the 4-H Building. "We'll go over all the details of the program

and give you a chance to meet some of the other walking participants," said D'Ette Scholtz, Thomas County Extension Agent. Teams are asked to have one or two team members attend the meeting. Bring a sack lunch. The program will kick-off Saturday.

### Storm spotter class slated

The National Weather Service in Goodland and the Thomas County Emergency Management will present a storm spotter and safety class in Colby on Tuesday, March 26. The training will begin at 7 p.m. in the Student Union of Colby Community College. For information contact John Lygeros Jr. or the Goodland Weather Service at 785-899-7119.

