



COLBY FREE PRESS

6 pages

Reminder:
Voting sites close at 7 p.m.

Deal favors jobless

TOPEKA (AP) — Kansans who are unemployed for more than nine months could receive two additional weeks of benefits in the next fiscal year under a deal struck by legislative negotiators.

The compromise bill also provides that the state would permanently stop reducing recipients' unemployment benefits by 50 percent of any Social Security payments or railroad pensions they received.

Legislative staff have estimated that the extended benefits in the fiscal year that starts July 1 would cost \$9 million, to be covered by Kansas' \$78 million share of a federal appropriation made last year for states' unemployment programs.

Eliminating the reduction of jobless benefits for Social Security and railroad pension recipients would cost the state an estimated \$1.2 million annually.

The compromise was reached Monday by members of a House-Senate conference committee working out their chambers' differences over unemployment pay. The Senate had approved both provisions contained in the compromise, while the House had approved only the section on Social Security and pensions.

About 17,000 Kansans would benefit from the two-week extension of state aid to people who had exhausted their 26 weeks of state benefits and 13 weeks of federal unemployment assistance.

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius had taken a different approach, proposing to spend \$14 million to eliminate the current one-week wait for unemployed Kansans to begin receiving their benefits. About 51,000 Kansans would have been affected by that change. But some Senate Republicans argued people who have been unemployed for months are under more financial stress. Sebelius ultimately agreed to support the two-week extension.

Now it's the voters' turn



MICHELLE L. HAWKINS/Colby Free Press

Marguerette Edmundson of Colby signed in to vote at Ward III this morning. She was assisted by poll worker Carolyn DeBoer. Edmundson and her husband James were among the early voters. Tracey Perkins, county clerk, said earlier that the number of

registered voters in Thomas County was 5,279. The ballots contain several contested races and this could lead to a respectable turnout. Results will appear in the Wednesday *Free Press* edition.

Seven killed as driver ignores order to stop

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — U.S. soldiers shot and killed at least seven Iraqi women and children at a checkpoint in southern Iraq when they ignored orders to stop.

The U.S. military said the soldiers opened fire Monday when the driver of the van failed to stop as ordered.

The soldiers were from the Army's 3rd Infantry Division, which lost four soldiers Saturday at another checkpoint when an Iraqi soldier posing as a taxi driver deto-

nated a car bomb in a suicide attack.

The fatal shooting at the checkpoint happened along Route 9 near Najaf, about 20 miles north of the site of Saturday's suicide bombing.

The Central Command said initial reports indicated the soldiers followed the rules of engagement to protect themselves.

"In light of recent terrorist attacks by the Iraqi regime, the soldiers exercised considerable restraint to avoid the unnecessary loss of life," the statement said.

Navy Capt. Frank Thorp, a U.S. Central Command spokesman in Doha, blamed the deaths on the Iraqi regime's guerrilla tactics and its practice of using women and children as shields.

"The most horrendous thing about this is it's the result of what is apparently the strategy of the regime to challenge us at checkpoints, which has caused us to be on our toes and ensure that these are not suicide bombers," he said.

"So the blood of this incident is

on the regime of Saddam Hussein."

According to an account by the Central Command, the van approached the Army checkpoint Monday afternoon.

Soldiers motioned for the driver to stop but were ignored.

They then fired warning shots but the vehicle kept moving toward the checkpoint.

Troops then shot into its engine. As a last resort, the military said, soldiers fired into the passenger compartment.

Purple Heart is presented to Kansan

BETHESDA, Md. (AP) — Cpl. Travis Eichelberger still aches from the broken pelvis and internal damage he suffered when a tank rolled over him two weeks ago in Iraq.

But the Marine from Atchison, Kan., struggled through the pain to sit at attention in his hospital bed Monday as a four-star general pre-

sented him with a Purple Heart, his father, Martin Eichelberger, said.

"Don't worry about that, corporal," Gen. William Nyland told Travis Eichelberger during the presentation at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda. "You're fine." Eichelberger was sleeping in a foxhole on March 21

when an American tank rolled over the lower part of his body.

Another Marine pulled him out of the way, perhaps saving his life. Eichelberger was transported from a German hospital to Bethesda on Sunday. His parents and his sister were all at the hospital for the presentation.

Sale of stockpiled wheat hailed in some quarters

WICHITA (AP) — The decision to sell stockpiled U.S. wheat to get cash for humanitarian relief efforts in Iraq has raised concerns the flood of reserve grain into the market will depress grain prices.

But industry leaders in the nation's wheat belt also contend the move may help the wheat market in the long run — saying the food aid provides a significant market for

U.S. farmers in a country where they have been shut out since 1991.

"I'm glad to see them do it, and I think it would be great if they start replenishing the humanitarian trust fund.

They have not replenished it after Afghanistan," said David Frey, administrator of the Kansas Wheat Commission and chairman of a coalition of national farm groups work-

ing on food aid issues.

Days after the war with Iraq began, the USDA announced an emergency donation of wheat to Iraq from the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust.

The trust, named after the late U.S. Rep. Bill Emerson of Missouri, is the U.S. government's hedge against famine in the event of massive crop failure. The United

States also uses the trust to help alleviate starvation in the developing world.

The USDA's Commodity Credit Corp. will use 800,000 metric tons from the trust for food aid in Iraq and Africa.

That includes 200,000 metric tons to Iraq, 200,000 tons to Africa and 400,000 tons marked for "as needed" use.

Briefly

'Bowl for Kids Sake' this weekend

The annual Big Brothers Big Sisters "Bowl for Kids Sake" will take place Saturday and Sunday at Colby Bowl. Call Tami Grandison at 465-9125 for additional information, to sponsor a bowler, or to make a donation.

Church open for prayer

Rev. Carol Rahn, pastor for the First Presbyterian Church in Colby, has announced the church will be open daily from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. while the country is at war. Those wishing to pray or have quiet meditation may use the church at 515 W. Fourth Street.

Notes from Heartland School

Heartland Christian School will hold kindergarten roundup on Friday, April 11, from 8:20 to 11:30 a.m. at the school, 1995 W. Fourth Street. All students entering kindergarten for

the 2003-2004 school year are invited to attend with their parents. To reserve your child's place or to receive additional information, please contact the school office at 462-6419 before Monday, April 7. Families wanting to know more about the school are invited to attend an informational meeting at 7 p.m., Monday, April 7.

Endowment annual meeting set

The Colby Community College Endowment Association will hold its annual meeting on April 14, at 5:30 p.m. All members are urged to attend. It will be held in the Fireside Lounge in the Robert Burnett Memorial Student Union. For more information, contact Nick Wells at (785) 462-4684.

Brewster school carnival scheduled

The Brewster School Carnival, sponsored by the class of 2003, will be held Saturday at the school from 4 to 7 p.m. Many games are planned. There will also be a silent auction

and bingo with prizes donated by area businesses.

Preschool enrollment at hand

Puddle Duck Preschool will hold enrollment Wednesday and Thursday, from 4 to 6 p.m. at the school, 520 W. 5th St. in Colby. Call Amy Jennings, director, at (785) 462-2603 or (785) 462-8388 if you need more information.

Area Citizens to meet

The Area Citizens for Health Care will meet April 8 at 7:30 p.m. in the Colby Community Building's Little Theater. The public is invited.

Turkey permits arrive

Spring turkey permits are now available at the Thomas County Clerk's office, 300 N. Court Ave., Colby. For questions, call 462-4500.

Loans await firms

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

Help could be just a phone call away.

Businesses in Thomas County and across the state, dependent on farmers and ranchers, could be eligible for help from the federal government, said Michael Lampton with the U.S. Small Business Administration in Fort Worth, Texas.

Within Kansas, there are 58 counties listed and businesses struggling from economic injury should consider applying, he said.

"These loans are intended to assist businesses in offsetting working capital losses which they suffered as a result of the severe weather reducing the crop income of area farmers and ranchers," Lampton said.

Don Fikes, who is a loan officer with the administration, said today that the first businesses that come to mind and eligible for loans would be those dependent on the ag producers for their livelihood.

Feed and implement dealerships would be some, but in rural communities where agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, nearly every small business from fast-food restaurants to clothing stores could be eligible, Fikes said.

In addition to counties in Kansas, there are also three counties in Nebraska affected and five in Oklahoma.

Along with Thomas, other neighboring counties listed included Decatur, Ellis, Ellsworth, Gove, Graham, Logan, Norton, Rawlins, Russell, Scott, Sheridan, Sherman and Wallace.

Other Kansas counties were Barber, Barton, Cheyenne, Clark, Cloud, Comanche, Edwards, Finney, Ford, Grant, Gray, Greeley, Hamilton, Harper, Haskell, Hodgeman, Jewell, Kearny, Kingman, Kiowa, Lane, Lincoln, McPherson, Meade, Mitchell, Morton, Ness, Osborne, Ottawa, Pawnee, Phillips, Pratt, Republic, Rice, Rooks, Rush, Saline, Seward, Smith, Stafford, Stanton, Stevens, Trego and Wichita.

"Farmers and ranchers are not eligible for these loans," Lampton said, "but nurseries that are victims of drought disasters can apply."

As the drought conditions continue, small businesses can apply for help by calling the Small Business Administration toll-free at (800) 366-6303 or for the hearing impaired, call (817) 267-4688. The deadline for filing application for a disaster loan is Friday, April 14. Businesses that believe they might be eligible for disaster loans are also encouraged to inquire.

The SBA, Lampton said, approved more than 50,000 loans in 2001 totaling almost \$12.2 billion, along with investing \$4.5 billion in small businesses through its venture-capital program.

The federal program, Lampton said, can also offer management and technical assistance to entrepreneurs through its resource-partner program.



Continued warm

Tonight...clear. Lows in the lower 40s. South wind 15 mph becoming west late. Wednesday...mostly sunny and continued warm. Record or near record highs in the mid 80s. West wind around 15 mph. Wednesday night...mostly clear. Lows in the lower 40s. Thursday...mostly sunny...breezy. Highs 70 to 75. Thursday night...partly cloudy. Lows around 40. Friday...partly cloudy. Highs near 70.

The numbers

Monday's high, 78
Low this morning, 37
Soil temperature, 49
Year ago, 62 and 32
24-hour precipitation, 0:00
Month's precipitation, 0:00
Records, 87 in 1940 and -4 in 1936

