



COLBY FREE PRESS

8 pages

Caucus

40th District Democrats pick Kerry

By TISHA COX
Colby Free Press

Colby played its part in the state's Democratic Presidential Caucus on Saturday with an overwhelming majority giving the nod to Sen. John Kerry. More than 30 Democrats turned out for the event at City Limits Convention Center.

The Colby caucus involved the 18 counties that make up the 40th Senatorial District.

Ten delegates, along with ten alternates, were selected to attend the district caucus in Ellsworth on April 3.

Tim Petersen, First District chair, addressed the group briefly before the caucus.

"It's still good to see we have the support out here," he said, adding the caucus' purpose is to elect the 10 delegates to send to the district convention. Five male and five female delegates were chosen, along with alternates for each.

Bob Streyve, Chris Gordon, Tim Petersen, Ken Poland, Tom Dreiling, Carol Barnes, Sandra Stenzil, Cathy Gordon, Diane Williams and Louise Ehmke are the delegates.

Selected as alternates were Cal Williams, Tom Betz, O.D. Calhoun, Bob Hooper, John Ostmeyer, Rosalee Seemann,

Tracey Perkins, Rebekah Petersen, Vera Sloan and Tisha Cox.

After the rules were explained, caucus participants were asked to gather next to the name of the candidate they supported. The names appeared on various areas of the wall in the convention center. They then were given 10 minutes in which to make that decision. After time was up, they couldn't change, but were allowed to during that time frame.

When the caucus started, more than half the room gathered next to the Kerry name. Howard Dean had two supporters during the caucus — Bob Hooper and his wife from Bogue. Hooper gave a pitch on Dean's behalf to the Kerry group but wasn't able to change any minds. Eventually, the Hoopers joined the Kerry crowd.

Judith Sears, with the Thomas County Democratic Party, said people should be "so outraged by what the current administration is doing."

"George W. Bush has done more harm in three years than any other president," she said.

Sears said people are probably already tired of the political campaigning but she was grateful for the people who showed up at the caucus.

"I'm pleased with the people who came here," she said. "They're

dedicated Democrats."

Sears was also pleased with how well the event came off. "I didn't anticipate it would last an hour," she said, adding she appreciated the people who had to drive some distance to get to Colby.

Democrats came from as far away as WaKeeney and Dighton.

Hooper said after the caucus it's always good to see his fellow Democrats turn out when they're needed.

He said President George W. Bush has committed "politically outrageous" acts.

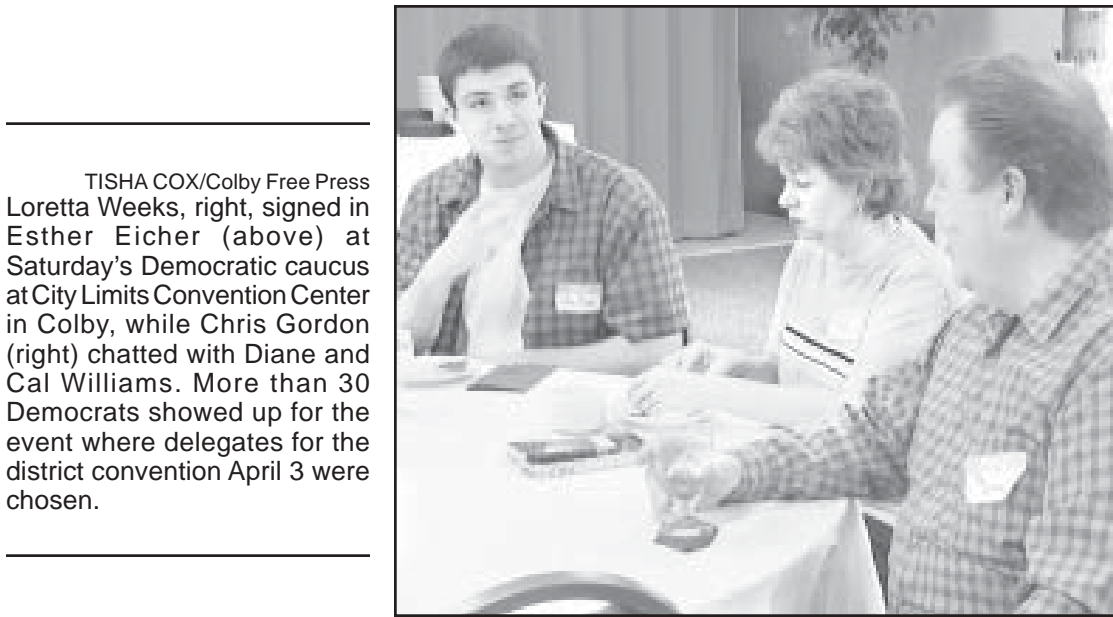
The presidential race, Hooper said, has been interesting because each of the candidates who have now dropped out each brought out interest in different segments of the population.

Despite his candidate dropping out, he will support Kerry. Hooper said everyone needs to put their focus on getting Kerry elected and "send Bush back to Texas."

Esther Eicher was interested in seeing the caucus process at work. The Colby event was her first caucus.

"They've never had one here before," she said.

Eicher said people need to get active if they want to change things. She also said it's good to know that there are Democrats in this part of the state.



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press
Loretta Weeks, right, signed in Esther Eicher (above) at Saturday's Democratic caucus at City Limits Convention Center in Colby, while Chris Gordon (right) chatted with Diane and Cal Williams. More than 30 Democrats showed up for the event where delegates for the district convention April 3 were chosen.



Breezy conditions to prevail

Colby, Oakley, Hoxie area

Tonight...Partly cloudy. Lows in the upper 20s. Northeast winds 10 to 20 mph becoming southwest around 10 mph after midnight.

Tuesday...Partly cloudy. Highs in the lower 60s. West winds 10 to 20 mph shifting to the northwest in the afternoon. Gusts up to 35 mph.

Tuesday night...Partly cloudy. Lows in the upper 20s. Northeast winds 5 to 15 mph shifting to the east around 5 mph after midnight.

Wednesday...Partly cloudy. Highs in the mid 60s. West winds 5 to 10 mph.

Wednesday night...Partly cloudy. Lows in the lower 30s.

The numbers
Sunday's high, 59
Low this morning, 35
Records for March 15, 79 in 1935 and -2 in 1912
Year ago today, 75 and 42
Precipitation past 24 hours, 0.00
March total, 0.74
March snowfall, 1 inch
Soil temperature, 47

The sources:
The forecast is from the National Weather Service office at Goodland, and other numbers are from the Northwest Research-Extension Center, Colby.

A recorded forecast updated throughout the day is available by calling (785) 899-7119.

Current temperatures are always available by calling 460-TEMP.

Funding for upcoming Chautauqua is explained

By TISHA COX
Colby Free Press

The Kansas Chautauqua is coming to Colby in June, but there are probably many people wondering where the money for the event is coming from.

Leilani Thomas, director of the Colby Convention and Visitors

Bureau, said they've already spent about \$9,000 of their own budget on the event, which covers most of its costs.

"Bleeding Kansas: Where the Civil War Began" will run June 11-15 on the grounds of the Prairie Museum of Art and History.

Locally, some of the money was

spent on costs such as marketing, the tent and other expenses later on. Right now, Thomas said they are trying to get donations to recoup some of the costs of the Chautauqua.

There will be no cost to people who attend the performances. "Everything is free to them," she said.

The Kansas Humanities Council also received a \$33,000 grant from the state Department of Commerce to help publicize the event. That money is being used for advertising in the 2004 Kansas Get Away guide, marketing and materials for the Chautauqua itself.

"This is the first time Kansas has

produced its own Chautauqua," Thomas said. "This is really exciting for us."

They're also in need of food vendors. Thomas said any organization or club wanting to serve bierocks, sandwiches and drinks from 5-7 p.m. before the evening Chautauqua should call 460-3401.

Republicans promise to advance highway projects plan

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — With more than two-thirds of the legislative session over, not a single bill to save some promised highway projects from cancellation has cleared its first hurdle.

But Republican leaders promise to outline a plan this week for shoring up the state's comprehensive transportation plan. Democratic Gov. Kathleen Sebelius proposed issuing \$465 million in bonds, but GOP leaders have opposed it.

In news conferences Friday, House Speaker Doug Mays, R-Topeka, and Senate President Dave Kerr, R-Hutchinson gave few details about the coming GOP plan other than the most obvious one — that theirs will rely less on bonds

than Sebelius has proposed.

Last month, Transportation Secretary Deb Miller said if legislators take no action this year, the Department of Transportation will have to cancel \$150 million worth of projects later this year and an additional \$100 million each year into 2008.

All of the doomed projects — which haven't been specified yet — were promised when the state enacted its 10-year, \$13.5 billion transportation plan in 1999.

Sebelius said last week she is frustrated by the lack of progress. Friday was the session's 61st calendar day, out of 90 scheduled, and no vote has occurred on a transportation bill in committee in either

chamber. "There are discussions kind of behind the scenes in both the House and the Senate but no bill at this point moving forward," Sebelius said Thursday during the annual Day at the Legislature program sponsored by The AP and the Kansas Press Association.

On Friday, Kerr said of fellow Republicans, "They're still working on it."

In setting up the transportation program in 1999, legislators promised to dedicate ever-increasing amounts of sales tax revenues to highway projects.

However, legislators just as quickly began diverting those sales tax revenues to other government programs, leaving a shortfall the

Department of Transportation has estimated at \$775 million.

Sebelius proposes to resume the sales tax set-aside in 2006, dedicating \$264 million over three years, in addition to issuing bonds.

However, Republicans have consistently criticized Sebelius' proposal, not only because it would increase the state's debt, but also because KDOT already has refinanced existing highway bonds to push \$161 million in payments due from 2004 through 2009 back to 2010 and beyond.

Under the governor's plan, total debt payments on highway bonds would spike in 2010 at \$210 million. Such bond payments are expected to be \$118 million for 2005.

Kerr said that with those debt payments — combined with demand for ongoing highway maintenance and other transportation needs — KDOT's finances will go "deeply under water." KDOT projects a funding deficit of \$238 million for 2010.

In the House, Transportation Committee Chairman Gary Hayzlett drafted a proposal relying on existing state revenues to shore up the transportation program.

Under his plan, the sales tax set-aside would resume next year and dedicate \$413 million over four years.

"We haven't stopped looking at alternatives," Hayzlett, R-Lakin, said in an interview

Sykes Enterprises changes its mind about closing facility at Hays

HAYS (AP) — Sykes Enterprises won't be closing its call center here after all.

In January, Tampa, Fla.-based Sykes filed paperwork with state and local officials announcing plans to close the call center in late March. Spokeswoman Andrea Burnett now

says the call center definitely will remain open past March 22, the date it originally was scheduled to close.

"Sykes has received additional call volume and that will require us to utilize the Hays site for a certain time frame," she said.

The Hays call center is not the

only one Sykes has said it will keep open despite previous plans for closure. Earlier this month, Sykes told employees in Ada, Okla., that it would keep open a call center there that had been slated to close March 8.

Despite the commitment to keep

the Hays center open past March 22, Burnett would not use the word permanent when talking about the company's future in Hays.

"I'd hate to say it's permanent and five years from now something happens, or even 20 years from now," she said.

Sykes has refused to say how many people work at the Hays call center. But according to the Ellis County Coalition for Economic Development, the center employed 370 people last summer. Some people have left since Sykes announced it would close.

Briefly

College board to meet

The Colby Community College board of trustees will meet at 5 p.m. today in the board room in the Administration Building on the college campus. Items on the agenda include a Policies Manual report, a resignation, approval of contracts and agreements, Chartwells amendment, dorm rates for the 2004-2005 school year, the Wellness Center, negotiations and payment of claims. The meeting is open to the public.

Amusement Association to meet

The Thomas County Amusement Association will meet tonight at 8 p.m. at the Thomas County Office Complex. The meeting is open to the public.

Boy Scout soup supper

Boy Scout Troop 141 will hold a soup supper starting at 4:30 p.m. Sunday at the Colby Community Building. The

supper is being held in conjunction with the All-Star game at the community building.

Hydrant maintenance scheduled

The Colby Fire Department is reminding residents that beginning today maintenance and flowing work on fire hydrants will take place around the city. The hydrant work is expected to take about one week, weather permitting, said Rick Dickman, assistant fire chief. For questions, call 462-4454.

Early childhood screenings planned

The Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center staff will be assisting Brewster Public Schools with free early childhood screenings on Thursday, March 25. The screenings will be offered to children with special needs. For an appointment, call Sheri Horney at Brewster Schools, (785) 694-2236.

Walk Kansas program begins

Those registered for the Walk Kansas program need to begin recording their miles walked on March 14. Any aerobic activity may be used in place of walking using the formula of fifteen minutes of activity equals one mile. For those who planned on participating and missed the registration deadline, D'Ette Scholtz, extension agent, urges them to call the Thomas County Extension Office as soon as possible at 462-4582.

Free workshop planned

Colby Community College will host a free workshop on the new Kansas Destination-Based Sales Tax Law on Thursday, March 25, in the Colby College Student Union, Room 106. The 90-minute session will begin at 9 a.m. Larry Barrett, one of the presentors, will review the purpose and methods of the new program and how it affects local businesses. This program is being provided at no charge as a business outreach service of the Colby College community service division.

