



COLBY FREE PRESS

10 pages

Health nurse talks about billing woes

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

An assumed oversight of about \$50,000 in outstanding bills at the county health department was brought to the attention of the Thomas County Commissioners at their meeting Monday.



Juanita Gatz

Juanita Gatz, who took over as county health administrator on last month, told commissioners the bills were incurred under the previous administrator, Juanita Dewey.



Jim Engel

Gatz said the health department's 2006 operating budget is \$172,556, but is in the red \$1,600 for its immunization program. She said there was a debt of \$17,000 in Thomas County funds carried over from 2005, and another \$6 debt carried over for the maternal and infant program.

"My staff has to justify everything, but they are very upbeat," Gatz said.

In addition, Gatz said a bill from Colby Medical and Surgical Center was submitted to the health department for procedures done from July 2003 to May 2005 in the amount of \$1,460.56.

"Obviously when you get a bill like this it kind of sets you back a bit," Gatz told Thomas County Commissioners.

Gatz said the health department's policy requires bills to be submitted the month after exams are done. Gatz told the commissioners she contacted the clinic and was told the bill was inadvertently overlooked so it was immediately submitted.

Gatz said 25 people listed on the bill had not received services from the health department. She said that number of employees multiplied by \$15 should be deducted from the bill if the commissioners decide to pay it.

Christensen calculated the total, minus the 25 incorrect listings, to be \$1,085.56.

"I believe that for any payments we make," Commissioner Paul Steele said "including payroll, we make sure that we'll just follow the law and we'll apply it to their personal property taxes."

According to records on file at Thomas County Treasurer's office, the revised amount can offset part of the \$1,229.72 in 2005 taxes owed by the clinic.

Bioterrorism trailer

Gatz clarified a statement Jim McGuire reportedly made at the Jan. 31 commission meeting that grant money is available from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment for buildings, and the Thomas County Health Department would like to have a place to store its bioterrorism trailer.

"Grant money may become available, but we don't have money for a building," Gatz said.

Roads and bridges

The commissioners met with Clair Schrock to go over the road and bridge equipment replacement plan.

Evans said he was "comfortable with the current replacement plan," and the board directed Schrock by consensus to get a bid on a three-section mower; a bid or lease option on a LT 9000; an estimate on a lease option for a Ford F250 pickup; and an estimate on a water tanker used by the road and bridge department and on a stand-by basis to assist the fire department.

Emergency management

Thomas County Emergency Management Director Jim Engel asked permission to appoint Tom Nickols as his assistant. Engel said Nickols has law enforcement and emergency medical technical experience and would allow Engel a back up when he is outside the county.

"If Tom gets training or called out he'll be paid by my department," Engel said.

"I'm assuming he's going to get qualified to be a certified emergency manager," Evans said, "but he's not on the payroll."

The commissioners also approved the application for participation in the Federal Emergency Management Agency grant program. Engel also said Thomas County would now be part of a 17-county regional emergency management area which includes counties "from Logan County north and from Hays west to Colorado."

"If compliant," Engel said, "the state will reimburse part of the budget for our department."

Evans said the reimbursements are not made in cash, but in equipment items such as the recent receipt of a large generator. The money comes to Thomas County by the way of the United States Department of Homeland Security.

Other news

In other business, the commissioners approved \$795 in abatements, by consensus had Evans vote for two of eight people to serve on the Chamber of Commerce board of directors. The names of those two people will be part of a tally vote conducted at the annual Chamber meeting on March 17.

Cookie counters



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Darlene Mick, service unit cookie manager, Penny Cline, service unit manager, and Brownie leader Mint Culver, with daughter Olivia, started the process of separating out what boxes will go to which troops. The semi filled with Girl Scout cookies were delivered to TNT Auction this morning with deliveries beginning tonight. The Colby Scouts sold 10,668 boxes of cookies. Anyone who may have been missed or might want an extra box may call Mick at 460-6988.

ered to TNT Auction this morning with deliveries beginning tonight. The Colby Scouts sold 10,668 boxes of cookies. Anyone who may have been missed or might want an extra box may call Mick at 460-6988.

Governor-candidate stops in Colby

By Tisha Cox
Colby Free Press

Republican candidate for governor Robin Jennison campaigned Friday in Colby during a 15-city tour to announce his candidacy.



R. Jennison

Jennison was elected president of the farm association in 1990 and his first term in the state House of Representatives was in 1991. He served five terms and was Speaker of the House during his last term in office.

"I was very fortunate," he said. After leaving the Legislature, he returned to farming near his hometown of Healy.

Time in Topeka kept him involved in politics. In 2002, President George W. Bush appointed him chairman of the Arkansas River Compact Administration.

His continuing involvement in Topeka and helped his decision to run for governor.

"I've become frustrated the past five years observing politics," he said. "People have become polarized by smaller issues instead of dealing with what's important.

"I've become frustrated the past five years observing politics."

Robin Jennison, candidate for governor

They're not immediate issues. They're a hindrance to major issues."

Some of those "immediate" issues he said are the economy, school finance and a declining population in rural areas.

Jennison said Gov. Kathleen Sebelius did not use her office to the best of her ability last year for school finance. "Instead, she was critical of the legislature, she should have kept the issue in the legislative process," he said.

Jennison said he doesn't like the state's formula used to determine school funding.

He said there's no crisis when it comes to student performance.

In 1992, with a Democratic governor and Democrat-controlled House, the statewide funding formula was created. He said the statewide formula has problems, and the old formula worked.

"Two things need to happen," he said.

"The first, a standard of excel-

lence needs to be established — what students need to know, and want to know, and then fund it. Local boards need the authority and flexibility to meet the unique needs of their districts," Jennison said.

Another problem he sees in the state is courts over stepping their authority, wanting to legislate.

He said representatives are elected to represent the interests of the state, not the court, and have to answer to the scrutiny of the people and press, while the courts work behind closed doors.

Another important issue for Jennison is the state's economy.

"The Kansas economy isn't keeping pace, and jobs need to be provided for people to stay," he said.

Jennison disagrees with raising taxes — he said it makes it tough to compete, as well as draw new business to the state.

He said people need to realize the need to grow the economy. One such opportunity is alterna-

tive energy, especially in rural Kansas.

"Kansas has a great role to play in that regard," Jennison said. "It's a bright spot on the horizon to take advantage of. It's closer than a lot of people think."

Ethanol, biodiesel and wind energy are resources waiting to be tapped. Jennison said land under the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Conservation Reserve Program could be used to produce energy. Another problem Jennison sees in the state is courts over stepping their authority, wanting to legislate. He said representatives are elected to represent the interests of the state, not the court, and have to answer to the scrutiny of the people and press, while the courts work behind closed doors.

He is also "enthused" about tourism and helped form Kansas Outdoors to promote Kansas.

Jennison and five others are seeking the Republican nomination for governor. The others are Sen. Jim Barnett of Emporia, who is also a physician. Author Ken Canfield, founder of the National Center for Fathering, Overland Park.

Dennis Hawver, an attorney, of Ozawkie; Tom Pickell, a Prairie Village attorney and retired automotive engineer Richard Rodewald of Lawrence round of the list.

Unanticipated revenues good news for lawmakers, school aid

TOPEKA (AP) — State coffers bulged with unanticipated revenues last month, building legislators' expectations Monday that they'll be able to meet court mandates on education funding without raising taxes.

But even as legislators pondered increasing aid to public schools, they worked on cutting taxes.

The House Taxation Committee endorsed a modified version of Gov. Kathleen Sebelius' plan to phase out property taxes on business machinery and equipment, sending the measure to the entire House for debate later this week.

The state collected about \$518 million in revenues in January, when it projected collections at \$473 million, a difference of \$45 million, almost 10 percent.

gan July 1, the state has collected almost \$3 billion, about \$69 million, or 2.4 percent, more than anticipated.

"Facing the challenges that we have got, this is very good news," said Senate Ways and Means Committee Chairman Dwayne Umbarger, R-Thayer.

The state also is seeing strong growth in its revenues over fiscal year 2005, which ended June 30, with collections for the current fiscal year running about 10 percent ahead of last year's collections.

Individual income taxes this fiscal year are running 11 percent ahead of collections last year. Corporate income taxes are generating nearly 66 percent more.

"This is further re-enforcement that the economy is growing," said Sebelius spokeswoman Nicole

"The No. 1 priority still in front of us is to solve the school finance challenge without raising taxes."

Dennis McKinney House Minority Leader

Corcoran. "Kansas businesses and workers are earning more, and we see that in these numbers."

Legislators face pressure to increase spending on public schools because the Kansas Supreme Court concluded last year that they had failed to adequately fund schools or distribute money fairly.

Lawmakers increased aid to Kansas' 300 school districts by \$290 million, but the court suggested it

was ready to impose further, much larger increases.

A legislative audit last month said the state needs to increase education funding by at least \$400 million.

The more the economy grows, the better it is for schools and other government services, said Mark Desetti, lobbyist for the Kansas National-Education Association, the state's largest teachers' union. "Obviously, there's no great ap-

petite for tax increases," he said.

But House Speaker Doug Mays said legislators need to consider tax cuts as well, to stimulate economic activity.

"Those should result in additional job growth, which in turn will result in additional revenues," said Mays, R-Topeka. "I think we have to take a long-term approach to this, to the problem of our job environment."

Sebelius' proposal would eliminate property taxes on new business machinery and equipment, and it enjoys bipartisan support.

But some lawmakers are concerned that local governments will lose revenues and raise taxes on other property.

The House committee's bill would require the state to make up the difference for two years be-

tween what a city or county collects on business machinery and equipment and what it would have without any exemption.

After two years, the aid would be phased out. There's no solid estimate on the cost to the state.

GOP House members also have endorsed proposals to reduce estate taxes; eliminate the franchise tax, which firms pay to do business in Kansas; and exempt clothes and school supplies from the sales tax for three days before the school year starts.

But House Minority Leader Dennis McKinney said legislators should be cautious about cutting taxes.

"The No. 1 priority still in front of us is to solve the school finance challenge without raising taxes," said McKinney, D-Greensburg.