



# COLBY FREE PRESS

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## Freeing the fire trucks



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

**ABOVE:** A support wall held up the roof at the Colby Fire Department Tuesday. The wall helped Woofter Construction crews remove the four-wheel drive pumper truck and rescue vehicle trapped since Dec. 31. The roof collapse resulted from the two-day snowstorm, Dec. 30-31. **RIGHT:** The roof failure was due to the heavy water and ice accumulation from the snowstorm causing the gusset plates to pull away from the rafters. Fire equipment and personnel are temporarily working out of the National Guard Armory on Range Avenue.



## Snow hampers landfill operations

By Tisha Cox  
Colby Free Press

The New Year's Day weekend snowstorm caused problems at the county landfill. The Thomas County commissioners discussed the issues during their meeting Monday.

"We were out of power a few days last weekend," said Larry Jumper, landfill supervisor. "I'd like to get a good generator."

The landfill has several small generators, which are not enough to handle its power needs.

Jumper said a generator is needed for the landfill to stay in business during bad weather, to keep fuel from freezing up and to provide power and heat to the building and scales.

Commissioners suggested

Jumper talk with Jim Engel, county emergency management director, about using one of his department's four generators for the landfill.

Jumper said a 10,500-watt generator would be adequate for the landfill's needs.

"We need something we can plug in, flip the switch and run the landfill," he said.

An 11,000-watt generator would be big enough to provide power for the landfill.

The snow has posed problems besides a power outage at the landfill.

Snow has piled into the trash pit and has caused a problem getting equipment out of the pit after driving into the pit.

"We've got slop underneath," Jumper said. "We can get down pretty easy but we can't get back

up."

He made a request for tire chains for the landfill's heavy equipment, and a snowblower, which the commissioners approved. The snowblower will be used to clear snow off the scales, and around the building.

The commissioners also approved the following appointments:

- Clair Schrock, county road department supervisor and noxious weed director and prairie dog control.
- Dr. Gary Slavens, county health officer.
- J.L. Ellis, radiological officer.
- Jim Engel, emergency management director/911 address director and Local Environmental Protection Committee chairman.
- Larry Jumper, landfill supervisor

and household hazardous waste director.

- Appointed to the Thomas County fair board were: Justin Alexander, East Morgan; Mark Anderson, Smith; Cynthia Bieberle, Colby Precinct II; Mark Bredemeier, Colby Precinct IV; Darrell Dible, Wendell; Audrey Hines, West Morgan; Nancy Rundel, East Hale; Clair Schrock, East Morgan; Bill Shields, Colby Precinct II; Brad Skolout, Barrett; Stan Strange, West Morgan Kathi Wright, West Morgan.

The commissioners also accepted the resignation of board member Marty Crampton, and are looking for someone to fill his seat. At the Dec. 28 commissioners meeting, the commissioners appointed Tom Chain to the board to replace Mark Miller.

## Bush talks about war plan today

WASHINGTON (AP) — Preparing to present a weary nation with his highly anticipated new war plan, President Bush faced Democrats determined to confront him over sending thousands more Americans to Iraq. Fresh troops are to be in place within three weeks.

For a little over 20 minutes tonight, Bush is to explain why a gradual buildup of about 20,000 additional U.S. troops, along with other steps expected to include pumping \$1 billion into Iraq's economy, is the answer for a war that has only gotten deadlier with no end in sight.

After nearly four years of fighting, \$400 billion and thousands of American and Iraqi lives lost, the

White House calls the president's prime-time address from the White House library just the start of a debate over Iraq's many problems.

"This is not, 'Give one speech, dust your hands off and walk away,'" presidential spokesman Tony Snow said Tuesday. "This is the beginning of an important process for the American people and for the political community to think seriously about."

The address — one of the most pivotal of Bush's presidency — is the centerpiece of an aggressive public relations campaign that also will include detailed briefings for lawmakers and reporters, trips abroad by Cabinet members and a series of appearances by Bush starting

with a trip Thursday to Fort Benning, Ga.

Since Friday, Bush has briefed about 100 lawmakers — meetings that were to culminate Wednesday with Congress' Democratic leadership and their Republican counterparts.

Crafting the new policy took the president nearly three months. Relevant agencies conducted reviews, outside experts were called in, and the president consulted several times with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and other prominent Iraqi leaders, the special prosecutor appointed by his predecessor to prosecute Dr. George Tiller, the state's most visible abortion provider.

## Rape trial: Young victim takes the stand

By Jan Katz Ackerman  
Colby Free Press

Hugging a large stuffed animal, the young girl claiming a 60-year-old man forced her to have sex with him took the witness stand Tuesday in Thomas County District Court in Colby.

Giving testimony in person and by videotape, the 8-year-old girl said Melvin W. Meyers inappropriately touched her "private parts" on several occasions since living with her family in 2005.

Prosecutors Assistant Attorney General Nola Wright of Topeka and Thomas County Attorney Andrea Wyrick of Colby also had the girl's grandmother, Linda O'Kane of Colby, testify against Meyers.

O'Kane said she cared for the girl on July 13, the date of the last alleged incident.

O'Kane said when she left the house to retrieve mail from the mail box about one-quarter mile away she thought the child was outside playing. After returning to the home, she said she saw the young girl come from Meyers' bedroom and questioned her.

Meyers, O'Kane and the child were residing with Bonnie Bilstein, the girl's mother, near Oakley in rural Thomas County. Meyers moved into the home in 2005 after Kyle Bilstein invited him.

Bonnie Bilstein said she and her daughter were abused by, the child's step-father.

Court records state Kyle Bilstein was charged with battery against his wife in July 2004, and was sentenced to six months probation.

The couple divorced in July 2006, the same month the young girl alleges Meyers committed the crimes. At no time during any of the testimony Tuesday was it indicated where the child currently resides.

Bonnie Bilstein, now of Bartley, Neb., testified in Meyers' defense, being called to the stand by his attorney, Doug Spencer of Oakley. While out of order for a typical jury trial, District Judge Glenn Schiffner allowed Spencer to call Bilstein to the stand knowing she was traveling to and from Nebraska for the trial.

Bilstein said Meyers played the role of a grandfather in her child's life, but after learning of the allegations she reported him to the police.

Spencer asked Bilstein whether the child has made similar allegations against anybody else.

She said similar allegations had been made about someone in 2002, but although investigated, nothing was found.

Bilstein said in 2002 her daughter told her ex-husband about the alleged sexual abuse.

Then the girl told her grandmother about the alleged incident involving Meyers.

Besides O'Kane, other prosecution witnesses were Thomas County Sheriff's Deputy Brian Diercks,

Undersheriff Jason Moses and Kansas Bureau of Investigation Agent Mark Kendrick.

They testified about evidence collected from the home and analyzed by the KBI.

That evidence included clothing, body fluid and hair samples belonging to both the child and Meyers and a bottle of mouthwash the child reportedly used after the alleged incident.

Also testifying for the prosecution was Tricia Carney, a nurse at Citizens Medical Center and director of Colby-based Sexual Abuse Nurse Examiner and Sexual Abuse Response Team.

Carney said she interviewed and examined the child the night of the alleged incident.

During cross-examination, Spencer asked Carney if she found any evidence the girl had been molested or participated in a sexual act. She said there was no evidence to either having taken place.

Meyers pleaded not guilty to the charges against him. He has lived in Thomas County for about seven years under the alias name of Peter Helt.

Kendrick said it was not until Helt was being fingerprinted did he disclose his true identity.

Wright and Wyrick were expected to conclude their part of the case today by calling Kelly Robbins, director of the Western Kansas Child Advocacy Center in Colby.

Robbins conducted the videotaped interview of the young girl played to the jury Tuesday.

Spencer said he would conclude his part of the trial this afternoon, after which the jury was expected to begin deliberation.

Meyers was originally charged with one count each of rape, aggravated indecent liberties with a child and solicitation of a child, as well as two counts of aggravated criminal sodomy.

On Monday Wright and Wyrick asked District Judge Glenn Schiffner to drop the rape and solicitation charge, and charge Meyers with two counts of aggravated criminal sodomy and one count aggravated indecent liberties with a child.

If convicted and depending on his criminal history, Meyers faces nine to 41 years in prison and a fine up to \$300,000 for the sodomy charges.

He faces four to 20 years in prison and a fine up to \$300,000 for the indecent liberties charge.

Kansas sets a maximum of two times the most severe penalty, which in Meyers' case is the aggravated criminal sodomy charges. If convicted, Meyers would be required to register as a sex offender.



M. Meyers



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

## Stuck truck

A city of Colby trash truck was surrounded by snow after the Dec. 30-31 storm. Trash pickup resumed Monday for all residential customers.