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Commissioners deal with pile of bills

By Vera Sloan

Colby Free Press
vsloan@nwkansas.com

After ending 2009 in the black, Thomas County commissioners were slammed with a load of bills to start off the New Year when they met Monday.

Ambulance Services Director Ken Gatlin was the first to greet the commissioners with a new bill. He said a defibrillator technical service bill for \$3,912 is due. The state requires the department to replace batteries and update software every year, he said.

He also told commissioners the lease on the ambulance building is due on Feb. 12, with a payment of \$7,800 for the year. The building is owned by Citizens Medical Center.

A letter from the Northwest Kansas Planning and Development Commission reminded the commissioners it is time to pay 2010 dues of \$8,297. Payment was approved. The letter noted that the combined valuation of the 18 counties in the com-

mission's region had declined by over 10 percent. However, the dues were up by nearly \$200.

The City of Colby sent a bill to the county for \$162 for the county's share of insurance on the building housing the recycling center on Country Club Drive.

"It's a fairly technical issue," said Commissioner Paul Steele, "but I believe that insurance law states that you must have an insurable interest in the property, and since the property is actually owned by the city, we probably should not be involved in the city's insurance."

He suggested the county clerk contact the insurance agent and have the county's name removed from the list of insured parties.

The commissioners read a report from Northwest Kansas Regional Recycling Organization on 2010 dues. They approved a \$5,460 dues payment and a \$6,000 assistance payment, which is a cost share

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Governor proposes tax hike to help schools

By John Milburn

Associated Press Writer

TOPEKA — Gov. Mark Parkinson's budget included what seemed to many educators to be a nice gesture, a \$50-per-student increase in state aid.

But this gesture requires legislators to raise taxes. If they won't, schools may face deeper cuts in state aid than those they endured last year.

Parkinson has proposed raising the sales tax from 5.3 percent to 6.3 percent to help close a projected \$400 million hole in the state budget for the budget year beginning July 1. Much of that

new money would go to public schools, including replacing federal stimulus funds that will run out after this year.

Absent the tax increase, Parkinson said schools would see an additional \$187 million in cuts, about \$286 per student.

Legislators continued Wednesday to examine Parkinson's proposals. Budget issues aren't likely to be resolved until late April or early May.

And education officials believe they'll be doing well to avoid additional cuts.

"What the governor has said very clearly is this isn't a choice of restoring the cuts that have

been made, it's simply stopping the bleeding," said Mark Tallman, lobbyist for the Kansas Association of School Boards.

A series of cuts over the past year have eroded much of the spending increases that legislators passed in 2006 to satisfy a Kansas Supreme Court ruling. The cuts have resulted in elimination of programs and staff layoffs.

"The governor's proposal gives us great hope, but I don't know how the Legislature will react," said state Board of Education Chair Janet Waugh.

House Speaker Mike O'Neal

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College begins spring classes



DEBBIE SCHWANKE/Colby Community College

Colby Community College sophomore Ryan Baalman checked his spring schedule with Linda Nelson at registration Monday. Nelson is the articulation and transfer specialist at the college. Baalman is majoring in criminal justice and business administration. He plans to transfer to Fort Hays State University after graduation. Spring classes began Tuesday.

Briefly

Dropout meeting cancelled

The Drop-INS post-summit meeting scheduled for Friday has been cancelled. Coordinator Jessica Noble said the organization didn't have enough people signed up to make it worth the effort to have the meeting. Noble said they are looking at alternatives, such as teleconference or video meeting, but no date has been scheduled. Drop-INS is a Kansas organization that has been trying to find ways to lower the high school dropout rate.

Hospital offers cut-rate tests

The Citizens Medical Center Laboratory, the Thomas County Wellness Committee and Thomas County Extension are offering blood draws for discounted lab tests from 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. through Saturday at the hospital's specialty clinic. Tests will include comprehensive metabolic profile, thyroid

stimulating hormone, prostate specific antigen and hemoglobin A1C for diabetics. Participants should fast for 10-12 hours. Results will be available at 5:30 and 7 p.m. Monday, Jan. 25. For information, call Jeanene Brown at 460-4850 or Diann Gerstner at 460-4582.

Conservation meeting Jan. 25

The annual meeting of the Thomas County Conservation District will be at 6:30 p.m. Monday, Jan. 25, at the Colby United Methodist Church. Make reservations by Friday with district manager Debbie Potter at 462-7482, extension 303.

Students offer Monday massages

Physical Therapist Assistant students at Colby Community College will hold a massage clinic from 4 to 7:30 p.m. on Mondays Jan. 18 and 25 and Feb.



KATHRYN BALLARD/Colby Free Press
This chukar partridge, a game bird in the pheasant family, was spotted wandering around by the Colby Grade School gym Wednesday. Police officers checked it out, but said the bird didn't appear to be dangerous or injured.

Chukar causes ruckus at Colby Grade School

By Kevin Bottrell

Colby Free Press
kbottrell@nwkansas.com

Colby police and grade school staff had a run-in with a strange bird Wednesday.

The police dispatcher received a call about 12:15 p.m. that a strange bird, "smaller than a turkey," was walking around by the Colby Grade School gym and the kids were afraid to go out.

Two officers went to check. What they found was a chukar partridge, a bird in the pheasant family, wandering around by the schools dumpsters.

Chukars, a Eurasian bird, are about 13-14 inches long and look similar to pheasants and quail, but with a distinctive black-and-white stripe pattern. Males and females look alike, with the male being slightly larger, online listings say.

The school's cooks were standing by with trash cans in case they needed to capture the bird, but the officers agreed it was not injured or dangerous and decided to leave it alone. The chukar was described as friendly and not afraid of people at all.

This chukar was likely a little far from home.

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Three northwest attractions finalists for geography wonders

The Kansas Sampler Foundation has announced 24 finalists for the "8 Wonders of Kansas Geography" contest.

"This is a great list for people who want to get out and see the diversity of Kansas," said foundation Director Marci Penner. "Several other significant Kansas landmarks are not on this list because they were voted on the overall '8 Wonders of Kansas' list, making them ineligible for this contest."

"They were Monument Rocks and Castle Rock in Gove County; Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, Barton and Stafford counties; and the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve and the Flint Hills, in Chase

County."

A selection committee chose the 24 finalists from a list of 76 public nominations, she said. The nomination had to relate to nature, be a "wow" in some perspective and be unique to Kansas and beyond.

Finalists from northwest Kansas include:

- Arikaree Breaks, Cheyenne County. Arikaree Breaks is a finalist because the steep-sided, rugged

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Some offices to close Monday

County and city offices will remain open for business as usual Monday on Martin Luther King Day. Colby schools and the Colby Community College will have classes.

Banks and federal offices, however, will be closed for the

day.

The post office will be closed and there will be no mail delivery. State offices, such as Social and Rehabilitative Services and the Colby Workforce Center, also will be closed.

Hearing set on emergency plan

Thomas County Emergency Management and E-Fm Consulting will hold the final public meeting for the Thomas County Hazard Mitigation Plan at 6 p.m. next Thursday, at the Thomas County Office Complex. A public comment period will run from Jan. 21 to Feb. 4, after which the plan will be set. Drafts can be viewed at the county emergency management office or the Pioneer Memorial Library. For information, call Director Susan McMahan at 460-4516.

Girl Scout cookies on sale here

Girl Scout cookies are on sale from Saturday through Sunday, March 7. If you don't want to buy cookies for yourself, you can mark on the order form for Scouts to deliver them to Genesis Food Bank, Kansas National Guard families or McConnell Air Force Base families. This year, the Scouts will not have a booth at the Home and Garden Show. If you have not been asked to buy cookies by Feb. 1, you may call Mint Culver at 460-6005 or Penny Cline at 460-2929.



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