



COLBY FREE PRESS

75¢

Monday

March 1, 2010
Volume 121, Number 33
Serving Thomas County since 1888

8 pages

Legislators questioned over budget

By Kevin Bottrell
Colby Free Press
kbottrell@nwkans.com

About 50 citizens grilled state Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer and state Rep. Jim Morrison on the budget and possible school cuts in an hour-long "town hall" meeting at Colby's Quality Inn on Saturday.

The legislators, who have been on a tour in their districts, appearing in Goodland, Hoxie, Hill City and Plainville as well as Colby.

They each spoke briefly and then took questions. Much of the discussion revolved around the state budget.

Ostmeyer said revised revenue estimates have come in and the state will be about \$70 million short for the rest of the fiscal year. Previous estimates put the state \$40 million short.

The governor proposed two tax-

es increases, on cigarettes and on general sales.

Ostmeyer said the two would raise about \$400 million, which is how much revenue estimates are short for next year.

Morrison said the tax proposal got out of committee in the House, but representatives sent it back to committee. Ostmeyer said he wasn't sure where the plan is in the Senate.

Ostmeyer said he would favor a balance of cuts and tax increases to close the gap for next year because a blanket sales tax increase might hurt business.

"Government doesn't make business run," he said. "Business makes government run."

He said he is wary of passing an overall tax increase because the temptation would be there to fix

See "BUDGET," Page 3

House approves business tax break

TOPEKA (AP) — The Kansas House has approved a bill expanding a business tax break in hopes of creating jobs.

The 84-34 vote Monday sends the measure to the Senate.

House members approved the measure even though legislators and Gov. Mark Parkinson must eliminate a budget shortfall for the next fiscal year.

Critics question whether the state can afford to give up any tax

revenue. But supporters say any loss will be offset by the taxes paid on goods purchased by newly employed workers.

The bill rewrites the rules for an incentive program created last year to encourage companies to move jobs from other states to Kansas.

More companies would be eligible, as would nonprofit groups, and they could pay lower wages than are now required.

A free loaf of bread



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Relda Galli from the Thomas County Farm Bureau handed Barbara Young-Duell a free loaf of bread Wednesday. Members handed out 100 free loaves at Dillon's for Food Check-Out Week, which marks the time when the average American family has earned enough to pay for its food supply for an entire year, and the bureau teaches about eating healthy while on a budget.



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Guard helicopters make pit stop here

Four Nebraska National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters from C Company, 2nd Battalion, 135th General Support Aviation Regiment, flew over Colby on Friday and landed at the airport. The company, known as the "Husker Angels," is a medivac unit based in Lincoln, Neb. Members were heading home from a training exercise in Gunnison, Colo. They stopped in Colby to refuel.



Agency can't afford tax on old building

By Vera Sloan

Colby Free Press
vsloan@nwkans.com

A vacant building at 1675 W. Fourth St. formerly occupied by Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas, and exempt from the property tax because of its charitable use, is back on the tax rolls, but the agency says it can't afford to pay.

After the agency closed its operation here because of budget cuts, the building set vacant and the county assessed it for taxes. Having to pay property tax has put a strain on the service's budget, Director Jerry Minchaud told Thomas County commissioners on Friday.

State cuts in the past few years caused the closing of the Colby facility, Minchaud said, but now that the building is vacant, the service is liable for property tax to the tune of \$9,106 since October 2008.

"Now is a time when we are least able to afford additional costs, since the building in Colby is no longer tax exempt," Minchaud

said, "and when combining a loss of some of the Thomas County tax support, the tax burden we assumed actually equates to a 20.5 percent reduction in funding for 2010. The funding from Thomas County dropped from \$80,639 in 2009 to \$77,500 in 2010.

"We continue to be creative: we are busying clients to other sites, we have eliminated staff throughout the organization, yet unemployment tax jumped by over 250 percent, to \$80,290."

He said the agency will be closing a group home in Hill City in March. It closed homes in Hays and Hill City in July.

Minchaud told the commissioners he would like to see the county get back to the 2009 level of support, but knew he could not expect them to make an immediate decision.

He said his organization has lost \$1.3 million from its budget over the past three years, while still expected to carry on its services. This has hurt people with disabilities, he said.

"We have to look at our own house first," said Chairman Ken Christiansen, "and we

can't promise anything, but we will look at it, and you know ... as you get cut, we get cut. But we will put it into further study."

Landfill supervisor Larry Jumper brought the county a check for \$5,582 from the city of Colby as its share of the household hazardous waste facility costs for rent and utilities. The city and county have combined efforts on household waste and will participate together in the citywide spring clean up this month, he said.

"We just need to make sure that (spring clean-up material) is sorted to Kansas Department of Health and Environment regulations and our operational plan, we're glad to do it," Jumper said.

Richard Bailey and Harlan Downing brought the commissioners a plat for a tract at the corner of Country Club Drive and Pine Street where they plan to erect a 195-foot cellular phone tower. The county had requested the plat at a meeting last week. They commission-

See "TAX," Page 3

Briefly

Center backers plan kickoff

The Multi-Purpose Activity Center committee will hold a kick-off event for its fund-raising campaign from 5 to 7 p.m. Wednesday at the Meadow Lake Golf Course and Lounge. Everyone is invited to enjoy hors d'oeuvres and learn about the MAC. For information, call Ashley Moser at 460-3321.

World Day of Prayer is Friday

Colby churches plan a World Day of Prayer service at noon Friday at the United Methodist Church. Lunch will begin at noon and a worship service will follow. Women from the Christian, Episcopal, Presbyterian and Methodist churches will lead the service. For information, call Millie Horlacher at 462-3104.

In Brewster, the churches will hold a service at 10 a.m. at the Community Church, 511 Third St. A fel-

lowship time will start at 9:30 a.m., with the service at 10. For questions, call Nadine Kemmer, (785) 694-2456.

Gem Lions supper Saturday

Winter days are good for homemade soup, corn bread and crackers, and that's what's on the menu from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturday at the Gem Community Building. Donations will be accepted, with proceeds going for community projects.

Professor to speak here

Dr. Ron Green, a professor of religion at Dartmouth University, will speak at 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 9, at the Cultural Arts Center at Colby Community College as part of the Max Pickerill Lecture Series. Sue Evans will give a review of Green's book, "Babies by Design," at noon Wednesday, March 3, at the Pio-

neer Memorial Library. For information, call Linda Davis-Stephens at (785) 460-5528.

No couples dance until May

There will not be a singles and couples dance in March or April. The next dance will be a free dance from 6 to 10 p.m. Saturday, May 1, at the Colby American Legion Hall. For information, call Lue Duffey, (785) 855-2341.

'Brown Bag' series continues

The Thomas County Ministerial Association will sponsor the *Lenten Brown Bags and Bibles* program at noon each Wednesday throughout Lent with the theme, "The Prodigal Son." Speakers will be Jarrod Spencer, Church of Christ, on Wednesday; Steve Todd, College Drive Assembly of God, March 10; W.G. Romine, Redeeming Love Ministries, March

17. Come to the Fellowship Hall of the First Presbyterian Church, 545 W. Fourth St. Bring your own lunch; beverage and dessert will be provided. Call 462-6342 for information.

District offers trees for planting

The Thomas County Conservation District is offering trees for sale to raise money to help pay for its annual meeting and for youth conservation education. Orders are due Friday, March 5. The trees will be delivered to the conservation office, 915 E. Walnut, on Saturday, March 27. For information, call district manager Debbie Potter at (785) 462-7482.



8 0 4 8 7 9 1 3 8 9 8 3