



And the winner is...

Republicans pick Goodland man as new lawmaker

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The ballots are cast, the tallies are in and Goodland City Commissioner Rick Billinger is the newest member of the Kansas House of Representatives.

Ninety-eight precinct committee members - or their proxies - from Sherman, Thomas, Sheridan and Graham counties gathered at Heartland Christian School on Sunday to choose a successor to Rep. Jim Morrison, who died Nov. 24.

Three other candidates were nominated: Dave Voss, a Colby City Council member; Brian Baalman, a Sheridan County farmer; and Brenda McCants, who does fund-raising and public relations for the technical college. Candidates had to be nominated from the floor.

To win, a candidate had to have a majority of the precinct committee members present, 50 in this case. If no candidate had a majority on the first ballot, the candidate with the fewest votes was dropped and a new vote was taken. It took three ballots and, in the end it came down to Billinger and Colby City Councilman Dave Voss. Billinger won with 53 votes to 45 for Voss.

In the first round, Voss had more votes than any other candidate at 39, but not enough to win. Billinger had 25 votes and McCants had 19. Baalman had the fewest votes at 15 and he was dropped from the ballot.

Billinger picked up eight of Baalman's votes in the second ballot for a total of 33. McCants had 22 votes and Voss had 43. There was still no majority, so a final vote was called for between Voss and Billinger.

Billinger, who has served as mayor of Goodland, said he has been involved in farming for 25 years, ran businesses - including a storage business, a trailer park and Nationwide Housing - for 30 years and has been on the city commission for 20.

"I will protect the rights of the unborn, the elderly and the handicapped," he said while introducing himself to the committee.

Billinger said he wants to bring in money for schools and hospitals, but without excessive regulations so that the decisions on how to use it could be made locally.

"Obamacare probably won't help us out here," he said. "We have to have funding to keep our hospitals vibrant."

On the state budget crisis, Billinger said he would like to lower taxes and find duplicate or unnecessary state programs to eliminate. He said he would try to stop unfunded mandates, programs that the government requires but doesn't pay for.

Billinger said he would be a strong voice for agriculture.

"Ag is the only export we have now," he said.

He added that he would like to see more "value added" ag jobs in the district, where farm products are put to other purposes than food such as ethanol production.



New 121st Rep.-elect Rick Billinger (above, from left) sat with candidates Brenda McCants, Dave Voss and Brian Baalman during the nominating portion of the Republican district committee meeting. Candidates had to declare themselves and then be nominated by a committee member. Billinger was congratulated by committee members, guests and citizens after being elected, including Colby promoter Rich Epp (right).

TOM BETZ/Goodland Star-News

Each candidate was allowed time to speak and answer questions on their positions. Voss began by reminding the committee members that the seat belonged to Jim Morrison, rather than to any of the candidates.

"Unfortunately, the Good Lord decided he needed Jim more than we did," he said.

Voss said he would push for more efficiency and cut the budget across the board. He said he had the Morrison family's endorsement.

Baalman said that while Republicans would have a majority in the House this year, there are too many members unwilling to compromise. He said a representative should be able to forge alliances,

and his cooperative nature and common-sense approach would have served him well in the Legislature.

McCants said her work ethic, strong values and experience made her a good candidate. She said she was the only one of the four candidates to put her name on the ballot in the primary election in August and had been all over the district to listen to voters.

"We're all the 121st," she said, "but things are different from Kanorado to Nicodemus."

All four candidates had been lobbying precinct committee members over the past several weeks. Baalman said he had spoken to or

See "WINNER," Page 3



Tarps, chemical jugs and fees top list of county landfill issues

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Landfill advisory meetings are not generally the most exciting way to spend an evening, but a session last Monday was a different story.

More than 15 people, a dozen more than usual, came from Colby, Brewster and Sharon Springs. They gathered at the Thomas County Office Complex to hear Larry Jumper, county landfill manager, talk about what's going on at the county landfill east of Colby.

The most puzzling question for landfills right now, Jumper said, is where they will put the "one-time-use" tarps and the long, worm-like bags farmers and elevators use for outside grain storage. Jumper said he gets about six truckloads of the one-time tarps a day from one elevator alone.

The tarps are huge, they're bulky and take up lots of room, with some being the size of a football field, and some landfills in the area are refusing to take them. Even though they're fairly lightweight, they're difficult to handle and aren't biodegradable.

able. "They'll burn, but the landfill is not allowed to burn anything except trees," Jumper said.

Jumper and Mike Schultz, a waste contractor from Brewster, agreed that the 2 1/2-gallon plastic chemical jugs used in no-till farming may turn out to be a problem, too. The law says the jugs must be rinsed three times, lids removed and the jugs turned upside down and placed back into the box they were in when purchased before they're sent to the landfill.

"For the most part, farmers are generally compliant with the law," Schultz said,

"Landfill operators can't always be sure if the jugs are empty and dry," Jumper said. "One of my employees had an episode this summer that caused him to become violently ill. He had convulsions and vomiting, and although they couldn't say for sure, indications were that the incident was caused from one of the chemical jugs bursting open from the pressure of it being run over. It may have allowed fumes to come up through the cab of the

See "LANDFILL," Page 3

Kansas coal-plant decision has long, complex history

By John Hanna
AP Political Writer

TOPEKA - The permit allowing a new coal-fired power plant in southwest Kansas is signed by the state's top environmental regulator and not Gov. Mark Parkinson, but Parkinson's fingerprints are on the document nonetheless.

The governor and his aides say he didn't pressure Acting Secretary John Mitchell into approving the Department of Health and Environment's permit for Sunflower Electric Power Corp., which plans to build the plant outside Holcomb. Mitchell says the same, adding that last week's decision wasn't deliberately rushed to keep the new plant from falling under federal rules on greenhouse gases taking effect Jan. 2.

Environmentalists had viewed the decision and its timing as in-

evitable and remain suspicious that Parkinson was directly involved. But even supporters of the \$2.8 billion project who take the governor and his Cabinet secretary at their word see Parkinson as important to Sunflower's getting the go-ahead.

Parkinson brokered a deal with the Hays-based regional cooperative in April 2009, allowing the coal plant - in return getting support from Sunflower's allies in the Legislature for initiatives he favored to promote wind and other renewable energy sources. Mitchell says other changes in state law, resulting from the governor's agreement, limited his power to reject a permit.

Without the deal, the Democratic administration might still be locked in a stalemate with Sunflower and its allies in the Republican-controlled Legislature, with

no prospects for either the plant or "green" legislation. "That initial agreement was key," said Senate President Steve Morris, a Hugoton Republican who supports Sunflower's project. "We wouldn't be where we are now, that's for sure."

The plant's capacity would be 895 megawatts, enough to meet the peak demands of 448,000 households, according to one state estimate.

Sunflower supplies power for about 400,000 Kansans through member rural electric co-operatives and municipal systems in the west, but three-quarters of the new capacity, or 695 megawatts, would be reserved for a Sunflower partner, Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association of Westminster, Colo., a "generation

See "COAL," Page 3

Briefly

School plans Christmas show

Sacred Heart Catholic School will put on a program of Christmas music at 7 p.m. tonight in the school gym, featuring second through fifth graders. For information, call the school at 460-2813.

Trash crews to take 'eves' off

The Colby Sanitation Department will not pick up residential trash Friday on Christmas Eve or New Year's Eve, Friday, Dec. 31. Routes will be picked up the day before both weeks. Have your tipper cans to the curb by 8 a.m. The department will not pick up commercial trash Friday and Saturday this week or next. For information, call the Public Works office at 460-4420.

Courthouse elevator needs repair

The elevator at the Thomas County Courthouse will be out of service Tuesday and Wednesday, Dec.

28 and 29, so a new motor starter can be installed. For information, call County Clerk Shelly Harms at 460-4500.

Court to close early for New Year's

The Thomas County District Court office will close at noon Friday, Dec. 31, so the staff can complete end-of-the-year accounting. The office will open again on Tuesday, Jan. 4. For information, call 460-4540.

Hill City artist featured at museum

Works by Hill City artist and teacher David Chalfant are on exhibit at the Prairie Museum of Art and History through the end of December. His sculptures and paintings have been shown in regional and national shows. For information, contact the museum at 460-4590 or museumed@st-tel.net.

Youth league to meet next month

A parent-player meeting for Youth League Basketball will begin at 8 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 5, at the Colby United Methodist Church. Coach Matt Ludwig said the cost is \$20 per player, and games will start the following weekend. For information, call the church at 462-2761.

College pool open weekdays

The Colby Community College indoor swimming pool will be closed after noon this week for installation of new heaters. It will be open for the early lap swim from 5 to 7 a.m. Monday to Thursday, and closed Friday. The pool will be open for lap swimming from 5 to 7 a.m. and from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday to Thursday, Dec. 27 to 30. Director Kip Nelson said the pool will be closed from Friday, Dec. 31, to Tuesday, Jan. 11, due to a lack of life guards.

He suggested checking the website www.colbycc.edu to see if the schedule has changed, or call (785) 460-5476.

Sheriff can check vehicles

The Thomas County Sheriff's Office can check vehicle identification numbers for cars, light trucks and motorcycles. The office is open 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Call Sheriff Rod Taylor at 460-4570 for information or to set up an appointment. Taylor said trailer inspections still have to go through the Kansas Highway Patrol office in Hays. The fee is \$10; the check is required to get tags on many vehicles.

