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KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

State Sen. Ralph Ostmyer spoke candidly about the "difficult" legislative session at a town-hall meeting Saturday at Colby Community College.

Education, agencies tying up Legislature

By Kevin Bottrell

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Sweetness and light in Topeka? The two houses can't even agree on how to cut \$25 million out of this year's budget, let alone nearly \$500 million from next year's.

"It's going to be a long, cantankerous session," Sen. Ralph Ostmyer told about 15 people Saturday at Colby Community College.

Ostmyer and Rep. Rick Billinger were touring their districts together on Saturday, holding "town hall" meetings in Hoxie, Goodland and Colby.

Ostmyer described the legislative session as "difficult." The House of Representatives has become more conservative, he said, and less likely to compromise. That's holding up agreement on a bill Gov. Sam Brownback wants to balance the budget this year and save money for the next fiscal year starting July 1.

"We'll get through it," he added.

The Colby meeting had one of the larger audiences. Ostmyer said he should have checked the high school sports schedules before setting the meeting dates, as the regional wrestling tournament was probably drawing off a lot of constituents.

State money for education has been one of the big issues of the session. Billinger, who replaced veteran legislator Jim Morrison this December, sits on the House Education Committee. He said there have been a lot of ideas thrown around.

One bill that went through the committee, he said, would cut off base state aid for students who cross state lines to go to a Kansas school. This wouldn't affect a district like Colby, he said, but it would hurt districts like Weskan and Goodland that live on the border.

Billinger said the Legislature has been wrestling with what "suitable" education means. The Legislature is required by the state Constitution to provide for a "suitable" education, but the document doesn't define the word.

"It's more than just reading, writing and math," he said, "but how much more?"

A well-rounded education should include some arts, music and sports, he said, but there are limits to what the state can afford.

Some of the larger school districts have asked for permission to have special property-tax levies to pay for activities. Such a levy would be inherently unequal, he said, because one mill in those districts

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House and Senate no closer to budget compromise

By John Milburn

The Associated Press

TOPEKA (AP) — Kansas legislators begin another week with dim prospects for finishing work on a bill to trim government spending in the current budget year.

House and Senate negotiators have been unable to resolve their differences on the cuts bill, sought by Republican Gov. Sam Brownback when he delivered his State of the State address on Jan. 12. Democratic leaders say it's time for Brownback

to step in and break the impasse.

"We need the governor to intervene and try to break this stalemate and show some leadership on this issue," said House Minority Leader Paul Davis, a Lawrence Democrat.

Senators said Friday that they were waiting for a "good-faith offer" from the House to resume negotiations on the bill. The two sides last spoke on Thursday.

"It's disappointing to me, because I'd like to move the process," said Sen. Carolyn McGinn, chair of the Ways and Means

Committee, "but it goes back to we need to see a good-faith offer so we can see our differences and move forward.

"There is no meeting scheduled."

Negotiations will be impeded this coming week by a busy time in the legislative process. Friday is turnaround day, the deadline for bills from all but a few exempt committees to clear their chamber of origin. That means legislators will be spending most of the week debating measures with few breaks.

Brownback said he wanted the bill on

his desk by the end of January, making adjustments in current year spending to save \$35 million by June 30. The governor says that money is needed to help the state close a projected \$492 million shortfall in the fiscal year that begins July 1.

However, House Speaker Mike O'Neal, a Hutchinson Republican, said without the rescission bill, state government faces a shortfall of between \$54 million and \$60 million that must be closed before the current year ends.

Legislators could try to draft another bill

to make those cuts, or leave it to Brownback to exercise his statutory authority to make cuts on his own, a practice used out of necessity by several predecessors, including Democrat Mark Parkinson and Republican Bill Graves.

The governor has not indicated whether he would be willing to step in and make the cuts, leaving it to legislators to find the solution.

The House budget bill hits that \$35 mil-

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Rock the test



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Colby Middle School cheerleaders urged their grade school classmates to "Rock the Test" at a pep rally this morning. Principal Lance Krannawitter said the students are about to

start No Child Left Behind testing, and he wanted to get them pumped up and encourage them to do well.

Foundation marks 10th anniversary

By Andy Heintz

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The Thomas County Community Foundation turned 10 this year.

Melinda Olson, executive director of the foundation, said the group's roots date back to 1999, when the Kansas Health Foundation identified Leadership Thomas County as one of 17 groups to be offered a \$10,000 grant for projects. She said the next year, the health foundation approached four people from Leadership Thomas County, Cindy Black, now president of the Colby Community College board; Rick Dickman, city building inspector; Cathy Harrison of the Harrison Funeral Chapel; and Leilani Thomas, director of the Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau. The statewide group offered a \$100,000 endowment grant to set up a community foundation dedicated to "making Thomas County, Kansas, the best place to raise a family."

Olson said the four founding members built the foundation "from day one." Black became the first president, Dickman, vice president; Harrison, treasurer; and

Thomas, secretary.

On Dec. 31, 2001, the foundation was born when the four members finished raising \$300,000 in donations from area businesses, the city of Colby, neighbors and friends, qualifying for a matching \$300,000 from the health foundation. The total included \$150,000 from the city's Special Law Enforcement Drug Forfeiture Fund. The money went to create a permanent endowment, with the income to be used for improving the county.

It's appropriate that the foundation doled out over \$300,000 this year, matching the initial investment in just one year, Olson said. The money went to over 65 nonprofit agencies, local governments and schools in the county, she added.

These grants have gone to groups including the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts and Big Brothers Big Sisters, to the Pioneer Memorial Library and Citizens Medical Center, the Brewster Grocery to purchase a milk cooler, \$28,000 in scholarships for students to attend Colby Community College.

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Briefly

Rotary to feed game crowd

The Colby Rotary Club will hold a soup supper from 5 to 7:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Community Building during the Colby High School basketball games against Norton. For information, call Gary Adrian at 460-2981.

College offers general ed classes

Colby Community College will have open enrollment for General Educational Development courses from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, Feb. 24, in the basement of the Davis Library at the college. The college is offering courses in the classroom and over the Internet in math, reading and technology. For information, call Jill Kriss at 460-5486.

Get a wellness check at Smoffee's

Thomas County emergency medical technician students will be performing wellness checks from 9

to 11 a.m. Saturday at Smoffee's coffee shop downtown. Checks include blood pressure and blood sugar. For information, call Dawnelle Umberger at 460-4585.

Apply now for foundation grant

The Thomas County Community Foundation is accepting applications for the "Kids Can Do!" The grants provide \$200 for nonprofit organizations or classrooms. Applications are due by Tuesday, March 1. For information, go to www.thomascountycommunityfoundation.com or call 460-9152.

Learn to save a life in March

Thomas County Emergency Medical Service will have a cardiopulmonary resuscitation information meeting for the public from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Wednesday, March 2, at Smoffee's coffee shop. It costs \$20 to be certified in the technique, but any-

one can attend the meeting. For information, call Dawnelle Umberger at 460-4585.

Storm spotter class here Monday

The National Weather Service will offer its annual Storm Spotter Class at 6:30 p.m. next Monday downstairs at the Community Building. For information, call the Goodland weather office at (785) 899-7119.

Baptists offer eight-week study

The First Baptist Church plans a "40-Day Bible Adventure" program Thursdays from March 10 to April 21, covering the full sweep of the Bible story as it has played out in history. There will be two sessions, one from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. and another from 7 to 8 p.m., at the church, Grant and West Webster. Everyone is invited. Call 462-2867 or 462-2336 for information.

Faculty plans candidate forum

The Colby Community College Faculty Alliance will hold a candidate forum for Board of Trustees candidates at 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 29, in the Cultural Arts Center on campus. Questions for the candidates may be e-mailed to bob.selby@colbycc.edu or deb.bickner@colbycc.edu.

Head Start looking for kids

Head Start, a tuition-free preschool, is accepting applications for its 2011-2012 school year. The school accepts applications all year long for kids aged 3 and 4. For information, call 460-6067.



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