



Public shares views with commission

By Kevin Bottrell

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Lawyers, judges, court employees and business owners made up most of the audience that turned up Tuesday to talk with members of a Blue Ribbon Commission that is looking into the Kansas court system.

Colby lawyer Cal Williams, Finney County lawyer John Wheeler and Patrick McAnany, appeals court judge and commission chair, met with the public at Colby Community College. Williams said the commission members were taking notes at 19 public meetings around the state, looking for ways to save money, and what services people want to keep local.

"We are examining all aspects of the court system," he said. "We want to improve the courts and make better use of taxpayers money. That's a major concern at this point."

Williams said once the meetings are done, the commission will organize all the information and make a recommendation to the Kansas Supreme Court, which will in turn make a recommendation to the Legislature. Even though the courts are a separate branch of government, he said, the Legislature controls the budget, and so can exert a lot of control over how the courts operate.

Williams said there were several areas he wanted people to consider, such as increasing flexibility of personnel, what services can be provided better regionally and what would be better done locally and how technology can be used to streamline the courts.

Williams said the commission



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Logan County District Court Clerk Nancy Gladin (standing, left) spoke to members of the Blue Ribbon Commission about her concerns over losing court employees at the public meeting

Tuesday. Judge Patrick McAnany (standing, right), the commission chair, acted as a moderator, giving the microphone to each person who wanted to speak.

has no recommendation yet, and is holding the meetings to get ideas from the public.

"We're not here to tell you what's happening," he empha-

sized, "we're here to ask what it is we should be doing. We're not here to close courts, we're not here to fire anybody."

Paul Bailey, who owns an ap-

praisal company and a title company in Colby, said that whenever corporations talk about making things more efficient, they usually mean cutbacks.

Bailey said a lot of his interaction with the court system involves looking up probate cases and lawsuits involving titles, and he was concerned about where he

would have to go and how far he would have to travel to look them up. Online records are good, he said, but a lot of records are not electronic yet.

Bailey said he is also concerned about small claims courts being too far away. Some business owners can't spend time away from their offices to travel to appear in court, he said, and so would not make use of small claims courts when they should.

Williams said location of records was something that hasn't been brought up before.

"Those are the kinds of things we need to take back," he said.

Thomas County Attorney Kevin Berens said that losing judges in some of the northwest counties would increase travel costs for lawyers.

Berens also asked the commission members to consider what effect losing judges would have on the poor, such as a person seeking a protection from abuse order who didn't have a car and couldn't get to a county with a judge. They could have a remote conference, he said, but people want to see and talk to a judge in person.

Judges in high-population counties like Shawnee do a lot of first appearances by remote, Berens said, suggesting that instead of eliminating judge positions in western Kansas, having western judges hold hearings over the internet for cases in eastern Kansas.

Berens also suggested the courts look at raising fees to generate more revenue.

Etta Walker, a lawyer from Sharon Springs, said that she also practices in Colorado, a state which has gone to part-time judges

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Fate of Kansas art rests with governor

By John Hanna

AP Political Writer

TOPEKA — The Kansas Arts Commission's chairman said Tuesday that he worries Gov. Sam Brownback will veto its entire budget, and the agency's future loomed as an issue in legislative budget negotiations.

The Republican governor hasn't said publicly that he'll use his power to veto individual budget items to strike the Arts Commission's funding from the budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1. But he has already attempted unsuccessfully to eliminate the commission as a state agency and replace it with a private, nonprofit foundation that would rely far more heavily on private funds.

Commission Chairman Henry Schwaller IV, president of a Hays real estate investment firm and a local arts council, said the state agency has drafted a plan for operating with less money during the next fiscal year — and another one for closing down in June, should it receive no funds.

"We're not certain, and that is our concern," he said, adding that commission members and staff

haven't been able to get meeting with the governor or his aides. "This is troubling to us."

Legislators were returning Wednesday from their annual spring break to wrap up business for the year, and House and Senate negotiators were expected to continue discussions about a \$14 billion state budget for the next fiscal year. Funding for the Arts Commission is among dozens of issues they must settle — but a contentious one.

The commission supports artists, communities hoping to have them visit, local arts councils and arts education programs. The commission and an advocacy group, Kansas Citizens for the Arts, are urging people to call or e-mail legislators and the governor's office.

The Republican-controlled Senate's version of the budget includes \$689,000 for the Arts Commission, a decrease of nearly \$109,000, or 14 percent from its current budget of nearly \$798,000.

The GOP-dominated House's version of the bill was in line with Brownback's recommendations, eliminating all funding for the

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BRUCE BANDY/Commercial Sign

A fleet of utility trucks from Denver lined up along Horton Avenue on Saturday as they prepared to head out again on I-70. The fleet of 30 trucks was headed to St. Louis to help repair damage from five tornadoes that hit the city on Friday.

Trucks stop here on way to disaster area

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A fleet of 30 Xcel Energy utility trucks stopped in Colby to gas up Saturday on their way to help restore power the tornado-devastated St. Louis area.

Fifty-five linemen, apprentices and crew foremen took the trucks from Denver to St. Louis over the weekend. Dave McCormick,

one of the engineers, said they plan to spend about seven days helping electric utilities there.

The trucks are needed to repair lines in suburban St. Louis, where two storms spawned five tornadoes on Friday. The National Weather Service said the tornadoes destroyed or damaged thousands of buildings in the suburbs of New Melle, Maryland Heights, Bridgeton, Hazelwood and Granite City.

Lambert-St. Louis International Airport took a direct hit from the strongest of the tornadoes. One concourse was put out of commission. Most of the airport's windows were knocked out and several planes damaged. The airport was back in operation within 24 hours.

The Weather Service said there were no deaths and only a few major injuries.

The area is also seeing heavy flooding along the Mississippi River.

Briefly

Orchestra reschedules concert

The Pride of the Prairie Orchestra has rescheduled its spring concert, postponed because of weather, to 7 p.m. Thursday at Colby Community College's Frahm Theater. Proceeds will go to the Vernon Akers family to help with expenses for Josiah Akers, a violinist, who had emergency surgery. For information, call Carol Ann McGuire at (785) 672-2380.

Congressman to hold meeting

U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp will be here for a town hall meeting from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. Thursday at the Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce office, 350 S. Range Ave. For information, call Huelskamp's office at (202) 225-2715.

Tree Board to celebrate Arbor Day

The Colby Tree Board will have an Arbor Day

celebration at 1 p.m. Friday on the west side of the Colby Community College campus. The board will have a short talk on Arbor Day, followed by a review of the board's Range Avenue project and an preview of its upcoming projects. For information, call Marvin Bickner at 460-6293.

Buy old stuff to help students

A multi-family garage sale will help raise money for the Colby High School forensics team from 7 to 11:30 a.m. Saturday at 405 N. Franklin Ave. The proceeds will help the students, parents and friends traveling to Washington in May for national competition. For information, call Katherine Kersensbrock-Ostmeier at 443-2479.

Foundation plans fun shoot

The Citizens Foundation will hold a benefit fun shoot at 11:30 a.m. Sunday at the Colby Trap Club

west of town, with competition for all skill levels. Registration includes food, 125 "rocks," prizes and gifts. Proceeds will be split between purchase of medical equipment for Citizens Medical Center and the club. For information, call Tama Unger at 460-1214 or Bob Luck at 462-0686.

County to test sirens early

Thomas County will test its tornado sirens at 10 a.m. Monday instead of noon. Emergency Management Director Susan McMahan said the county will test the sirens in conjunction with a Colby Community College tornado drill. For information, call McMahan at 460-4516.

Reception to honor retired dean

The public is invited to a reception honoring Gracemary Melvin as the Colby Community College 2011 Honorary Associate Degree recipient at 3

p.m. Monday in the Student Union. Melvin was an instructor and dean of instruction at the college for 35 years. For information, call Debbie Schwanke at (785) 460-5411.

Clean up city, county next week

Colby and Thomas County are sponsoring a countywide Cleanup Week from Monday to Friday, May 6. Service clubs will clean parks or public places and city garbage crews will be on hand to handle any extra trash. Trash should be boxed or bagged and placed at the street in front of the property. Anyone who wants to volunteer to help the elderly or infirm should call Anita Powell at 460-4420.

