

Weather



National Weather Service

Tonight: Cloudy, then gradually becoming partly cloudy, with a low around 15. Blustery, with a north wind between 15 and 20 mph becoming calm. Winds could gust as high as 30 mph.

Friday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 38. Calm wind becoming south between 10 and 15 mph.

Friday Night: A 40 percent chance of snow, mainly after midnight. Increasing clouds, with a low around 23. South wind 10 to 15 mph becoming north.

Saturday: Snow and areas of blowing snow. High near 28. Blustery, with a north wind between 15 and 25 mph, with gusts as high as 35 mph. Chance of precipitation is 80 percent.

Saturday Night: A 20 percent chance of snow before midnight. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 12.

Sunday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 31.

Sunday Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 17.

Monday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 28.

Monday Night: Mostly clear, with a low around 11.

Tuesday: Sunny, with a high near 37.

Tuesday Night: Mostly clear, with a low around 19.

Wednesday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 43.

Wednesday: High, 58; Low 24 Precip: Wednesday None Month: None Year: 19.63 inches Normal: 20.65 inches (K-State Experiment Station) Sunrise and Sunset Friday 7:46 a.m. 5:21 p.m. First quarter Moon at 3:53 a.m. (U.S. Naval Observatory)

Committee urges merger delay

TOPEKA (AP) - An interim legislative committee has urged Gov. Sam Brownback to delay combining Kansas juvenile justice programs with the state's social services agency...

Members of the House-Senate Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice were critical of the proposal during the committee meeting Tuesday and recommended that the effort be delayed until it's thoroughly studied...

Rep. Pat Colloton, a Leawood Republican and chairwoman of the committee, told Social and Rehabilitation Services Secretary Rob Siedlecki that he should have gathered more information before making such a proposal.

"This sounds like ready, fire, aim," she said.

Brownback wants to place juvenile justice programs under SRS as part of his reorganization of state agencies linked to sweeping changes in the state's Medicaid programs.

istration says the changes, which include awarding contracts to private-sector managed care providers, will allow the state to curb the growth in Medicaid spending...

Sen. Dick Kelsey, a Goddard Republican, made the motion recommending that Brownback not issue an executive order reorganizing the programs until more research is completed.

"This whole thing hasn't been vetted enough," Kelsey said.

Siedlecki and Juvenile Justice Authority Commissioner Curtis Whitten have scheduled a meeting Dec. 12 to meet with those affected by the changes to discuss the moves.

Several legislators and local juvenile justice officials said SRS wasn't equipped to handle the new tasks, such as intake and assessment of juvenile offenders and administering prevention grants.

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it,"

said Sen. Tim Owens, an Overland Park Republican.

Owens and Siedlecki exchanged words after the senator said he found it offensive that people hired by the administration from out of state haven't done their research in Kansas before proposing changes.

"I prefer you call me a Kan-

san," Siedlecki said.

The meeting was the latest instance of the SRS secretary, legislators and advocates engaging in often tense discussions over policy changes.

Lobbyists and law enforcement officials attending the hearing noted that the current system was developed in the late 1990s when juvenile justice programs were removed from SRS control because of the agency's failings.

State revenue up

TOPEKA (AP) - Kansas revenue collections are up for November, with the state taking in \$2.5 million more in taxes than anticipated.

Revenue Secretary Nick Jordan says Wednesday the state collected \$2.4 million more in sales taxes than projected.

Overall, Kansas collected \$405.8 million in November. A group of economists and researchers had predicted earlier this month that the state would

collect \$403.4 million.

The state has collected nearly \$2.3 billion since the fiscal year began July 1. That's \$144.3 million, or 6.7 percent, more than through the same period last fiscal year.

Jordan says the revenue collections show steady growth in the Kansas economy. But he says the state must be careful not to disrupt what he sees as positive trends.

Governor, administration make water proposals

From "WATER," Page 1

tomatically lose them.

"That's not the case," he said.

The use it or lose it law looks at five years of water usage, plus a bevy of other requirements to determine whether a particular water right should be taken back.

Bossert said if a water user wants to set aside their rights for a period of time and still have them in the future, they can agree to a conservation plan with the chief engineer. However, a lot of people don't know they can do that, he said, and the state should have thought about putting more money into educating water users on their options.

Provide a process for creating conservation plans - Local Enhancement Management Plans - that can include mandatory reductions and other corrective measures. The local Groundwater Management District would originate the plan and the state's chief engineer would have to approve it.

Bossert said this was District Four's pro-

posal to the committee, and the committee has embraced it.

As it is now, he said, the only conservation tool is the Intensive Groundwater Use Control Area program. Under that program, the chief engineer holds public meetings on a proposal where anyone can float any idea.

"We have no idea what will come out," he said. "That can be risky, and there's no way to stop the process."

For this reason, the program has only been used a few times. However, Bossert said, the types of conservation measures you could put in place with the program were good.

The proposed management plans would still originate at the local level and be sent to the chief engineer, but the plans would be the sole focus of the hearing.

Bossert said the chief engineer can approve the plan, reject it or send it back to the district. He could send it back for two reasons: if it is not consistent with state laws, or if there are suggestions to improve it. However, those suggestions cannot make the plan more restrictive.

"This is a more locally friendly process," Bossert said. "It doesn't guarantee they (water users) will get everything they want, but it does guarantee they won't get what they don't want."

Allow development of new groundwater water banks to relocate water use and provide conservation in dry areas. Water banks provide a mechanism for buying, selling and trading water rights. A water right owner can deposit their right into the bank, which can in turn allow someone else to pay to use that water, a payment which goes to the original owner. Bossert said 10 percent of the rights that go into a bank have to be retained for conservation.

Bossert said there has been a national pilot program for the past seven years, with

two banks chartered in Kansas, one of which is a groundwater bank. That program was to sunset this year. The administration's recommendation is to extend the lifetime of the program and remove the two-bank limit.

Bossert said he didn't know how much usage this recommendation will get if approved. The current groundwater bank is not very active.

Amend multi-year flex accounts to give irrigators more capability to manage their crop water over a five-year period.

Bossert said six to seven years ago the state created a program where water users could sign an agreement with the chief engineer to create a flex plan. The plan would take their average water use over the past five years, then subtract 10 percent. The user would get to use that total amount of water over the next five years, but they can use it whenever they want within that time, whether spread out or all at once.

However, Bossert said, those were wet years, so users were not irrigating as much, which threw off their averages. The new recommendation would make some corrections to even that out, while keeping the conservation component.

"The concept is good," he said.

The Kansas Water Authority, Kansas Water Office and the Department of Agriculture were planning four public meetings - in Colby, Wichita, Topeka and Garden City - to talk about the proposed legislation. The Colby meeting will be at 2 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 13, at Colby Community College.

The Ogallala Committee will continue to meet over the next year. Bossert said he and the other districts would continue to make suggestions.

"The committee has been an interesting experience," he said. "They have been pretty open and pretty open minded."

Welfare fraud could be costing taxpayers millions

From "FRAUD," Page 1

"During the time I was secretary, there were very tight resources," Jordan said.

The department tried to ensure "eligible people got the amount of benefits they were eligible for. We didn't put a higher or lower priority on any part of that job, including detecting fraud. The main way you do that is by determining eligibility up front," he said.

Siedlecki said two weeks ago that his director of fraud investigation, Ken

Thompson, was appointed by state Attorney General Derek Schmidt as a special assistant attorney general and would have prosecutorial authority. What that means, Siedlecki explained, is that his department could criminally prosecute people who commit welfare fraud in Kansas.

In the past, the most the state could do was pursue lawsuits. While civil judgments can be dismissed in bankruptcy court, he said, criminal restitution orders can't.

Table for Saturday Evening December 3, 2011. Columns: Time (7:00-11:30), Channel (KAKE/ABC, KBSL/CBS, etc.), Program Name.

Table for Sunday Evening December 4, 2011. Columns: Time (7:00-11:30), Channel (KAKE/ABC, KBSL/CBS, etc.), Program Name.

Table for American Profile. Columns: Program Name, Description, Cast Members.

LOCAL TV Listings logo and 'Sponsored by the COLBY FREE PRESS' text.

Table for Premium Channels. Columns: Channel Name, Program Name.

Briefly

Legion group plans to send care packages

The Colby American Legion Auxiliary is taking donations for the Christmas Care Package Drive. The Auxiliary will be sending holiday care packages to soldiers serving overseas.

Enter parade now

Registration is open for the Colby Christmas Light Parade. Forms are available at the Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce office at 350 S. Range.

Dance the night away Saturday at golf course

A Single's and Couple's Dance will be held from 6 to 10 p.m. Saturday at the Meadow Lake Golf Club. Gary Phipps will be the musician.

Come to the workshop this coming Saturday

The Thomas County Community Foundation will operate Santa's Workshop from 9 to 11:30 a.m. Saturday at the Thomas County Office Complex.

Lions to serve pancakes

The High Plains Lions Club will hold a pancake feed from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday at the Colby Community Building.

Prairie orchestra to play this Sunday

The Pride of the Prairie Orchestra will present "A Cozy Christmas with the POP" at 3:30 p.m. Sunday in the Cultural Arts Center at Colby Community College.

Health department to hold flu clinic

The Thomas County Health Department will hold an all-day flu clinic from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday at the department office, 350 S. Range Ave.

Grade school students to sing on Tuesday

The Colby Grade School fifth grade class will perform their music program "Once on a Housetop" at 2 p.m. and again at 7 p.m. Tuesday in the grade school auditorium.