



Legislator says session results mixed

By Kevin Bottrell

The Goodland Star-News
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Much like last year, the 2013 Kansas Legislature proved contentious, with deadlocks and rejected proposals pushing the session nine days past its 90-day limit. This time, however, the issue wasn't congressional redistricting; it was the state budget and taxes. Now back at his St. Francis home after the session, Rep. Ward Cassidy said he is writing a column looking back on how the session went.

"There were some things I liked and some things I didn't," Cassidy added.

The representative said he thought his major accomplishment for the session was helping to reverse a budget cut for community and technical colleges. Higher education was set to get a 1.5 percent across-

the-board cut, he said.

Cassidy said he did not like the fact that four-year colleges — especially Fort Hays State University — still got cut.

"When you vote for a budget, you do it because there are things in it you like," he explained. "There are also things you don't like."

Public schools did not get cut this year, he said, and may be in line for a \$10 to \$12 increase in base aid next year, depending on how a lawsuit against the state turns out. That lawsuit, brought by a collection of school districts, alleges that the state has failed to fund schools as guaranteed under the Kansas Constitution.

"I don't agree with that lawsuit," Cassidy said, adding that if the courts find in favor of the districts, the Legislature may need a special session to decide how to increase the budget.

"I think the schools will win that," he said. "Then the question is: 'How much money and where do we get it?' It certainly doesn't fit into the governor's tax plan."

The bottom line on the tax plan, Cassidy said, is that the state sales tax rate will drop from 6.3 percent to 6.15 in a compromise between the House and Senate. The five-year tax plan would reduce the state income tax each year until it zeros out.

The tax plan was the key to the session, Cassidy said, and the Legislature had to come up with about \$200 million in cuts to make it work. The cut to higher education was part of that, but Cassidy said he and a group of other legislators fought to keep community and technical colleges out of that.

Cassidy said he was happy that the Legislature was able to keep charitable deductions from income taxes at 100 percent of their value, and that they were

able to expand the Rural Opportunity Zone to include more counties. The tax incentives make those counties attractive to new businesses and employees, he said.

There were other new laws that might affect northwestern Kansas, Cassidy said:

- One of the issues on which he gets the most feedback is gun legislation.

"We passed some good gun legislation," he said, "essentially reaffirming to the federal government that they can't mess with us."

The Legislature also passed law which recognizes the concealed-carry permits of other states, allowing anyone with a permit to carry their weapon in Kansas. Cassidy said there are still some questions that the attorney general's office will need to work

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County chooses appraiser

By Heather Alwin

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The Thomas County commissioners hired a new county appraiser Monday after a closed-door discussion with deputy appraiser Kathy Cunningham.

Bruce Webb, who recently became Cheyenne County's appraiser, accepted the position when the commissioners called him during the meeting.

Webb said he was the county appraiser for Osborne County for over 29 years and for Jewell County for 15 of those years. He became the appraiser for Cheyenne County in October 2008 after he retired from the previous job.

He said he plans to work three days each week in Thomas County and one in Cheyenne.

Webb currently earns \$40,745 per year in Cheyenne County, and his overall salary will increase to \$70,000 when he takes on the appraiser's role for Thomas County. Thomas County will contribute \$50,000, along with a share of his benefit costs, with the rest to be paid by Cheyenne County.

In other business, the commis-

sioners:

- Reviewed a 2014 budget proposal from Kasiah Rothchild, Health Department director, that included a summary of the department's budget information going back to 2007. Commissioner Paul Steele, who previously had been frustrated with the stacks of paperwork the department submitted, said he was pleased with the newly streamlined summary.

"I think you did a really good job," he told Rothchild.

The director said she expects a \$25,048 decrease in revenue next year, about 12 percent, since more area providers offer flu shots, and projects her department's expenses will increase by \$3,650.

- Approved Rothchild's proposal to sell a department-owned cabinet for \$30 since no other county agency wanted it.

- Encouraged her to get three prices for a new shed she wants to install at the community garden site. Since the shed should cost around \$3,000, a formal bidding process is not required, Steele said.

- Appointed Dr. John Dygert as

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Wednesday rollover hospitalizes driver

A truck went out of control and swerved twice across U.S. 40 Wednesday morning in Logan County, rolling into a ditch and sending the driver to the hospital.

The Kansas Highway Patrol reported the driver, Charles Bliss, 62, Sharon Springs, went into the south ditch of the highway about 10:45 a.m. He was 10 miles west of Winona, headed east towards the town.

Troopers reported Bliss overcorrected, steering his 2009 Sterling truck to the north side of the road and then back again, going back into the ditch and rolling the truck onto its passenger side.

Although his truck was driven from the scene, Bliss needed a trip to Logan County Hospital, which did not immediately return calls asking about his condition.

Colorado Springs-area wildfire destroys at least 360 homes

By Nicholas Riccardi

Associated Press

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (AP) — A wildfire in a dry, densely wooded area of Colorado has destroyed at least 360 homes — nearly four times the previous estimate and a number that seemed likely to climb as the flames kept burning out of control, authorities said Thursday.

The tally of lost homes was a dramatic increase from Wednesday evening, when 92 homes were listed as gone. The blaze in the Black Forest area northeast of Colorado Springs is now the most destructive in Colorado history, surpassing last year's Waldo Canyon fire, which burned 347 homes, killed two people and led to \$353 million in insurance claims.

"I never in my wildest dreams imagined we'd be dealing a year later with very similar circumstances," said El Paso County Sheriff Terry Maketa. "Maybe we just had 20 to 30 years of luck."

Deputies still have not been able to verify the condition of 79 other homes, so the losses could rise.

Some of the homes that were previously listed as standing were destroyed as high winds pushed the 23-square-mile wildfire back into areas that had already burned, the sheriff said.

The number also rose because deputies worked through the night to assess the damage, although they were also pushed out by the flames at times.

"Houses we knew were standing yesterday I personally witnessed they were

lost last night," Maketa said.

Fueled by hot temperatures, wind gusts and bone-dry forest conditions, the flames have also forced more evacuations. About 38,000 people who live in an area spanning nearly 70 square miles were under mandatory orders to get out.

Jaenette Coyne was one of those ordered to leave as quickly as possible.

After calling 911 to report smoke behind her home, Coyne estimated she had five minutes to leave home. There was no time to grab wedding albums, fingerprint artwork by her 20-month-old daughter, quilts her grandmother made or the family's three cats.

"We left with nothing," she said.

She and her husband later watched on television as flames engulfed their house.

"I don't know how to tell you in words what it felt like," she said. "It's the worst thing I've ever felt in my whole life."

Part of neighboring Elbert County, including two camps with about 1,250 children and adults, was also evacuated.

No injuries or deaths have been reported, but Maketa said officials are trying to confirm the whereabouts of one person reported missing.

The fire was among several that have been burning along Colorado's Front Range. Wildfires were also burning in New Mexico, Oregon and California, where a smokejumper was killed fighting one of dozens of lightning-sparked blazes.

The U.S. Forest Service on Wednesday mobilized a pair of Defense Department

cargo planes to help — a step taken only when all of the Forest Service's 12 contracted tankers are in use. At least one was fighting the Black Forest fire.

About 60 miles southwest of the Black Forest, a 4.5-square-mile wildfire that evacuated Royal Gorge Bridge & Park has destroyed 20 structures, including some in the park.

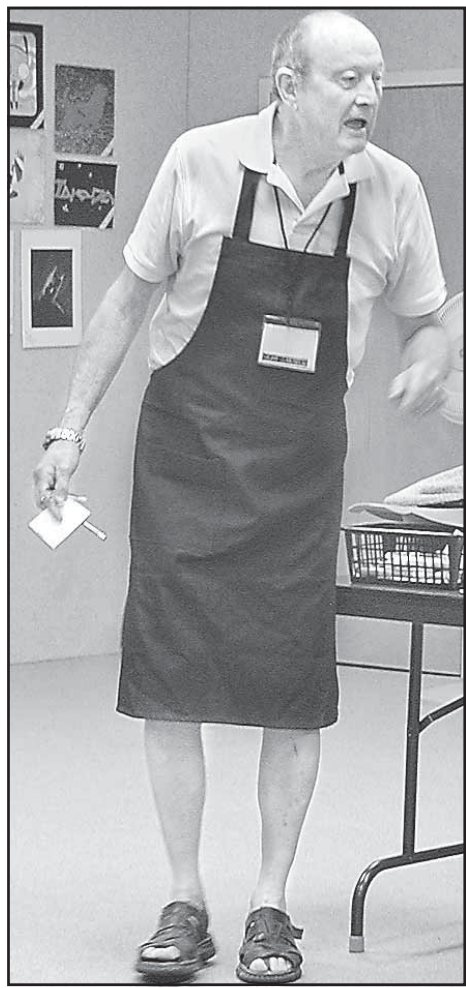
The Royal Gorge suspension bridge spanning a canyon across the Arkansas River has fire damage to 32 of its 1,292 wooden planks, city officials said. An aerial tram car and tram buildings on ei-

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Museum 'haunts' visit

The Prairie Museum of Art and History will conclude its week-long historical performance camp, "Night at the Museum," with a performance Friday.



Seven children and four adults will be ready to show off what they have learned during the camp in a series of six small-group tours. Visitors will be led through the museum by a guide, encountering figures from the region's past along the way.

"We won't know until the campers choose their characters just who the public will be apt to encounter," said Ann Miner, the museum's education director. "Half the fun is seeing what the campers choose and what they do with the performances."

During the free camp, participants researched an item in the museum's collection and an associated historical figure while developing a short performance as that person. Campers are given research guidance and encouraged to use their imagination as they get into character.

"One new camper has proposed to research one of his ancestors who was murdered on the streets of Colby," Miner said. "We aren't sure yet how this may unfold, whether in the eyes of a reporter or the ancestor himself, but we are very excited to see how the presentation will develop."

The camper, Brock O'Brien of Colby, is an eight-grade homeschooler with theater experience from Colby Community College's performance of "Paint Your Wagon," she said.

The free tours will be offered at 3 p.m., 3:30 p.m., 5 p.m., 5:30 p.m., 6 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. Refreshments will be served at 6:30 p.m. and performers will answer questions after the tours, at 7:15 p.m.

Reservations are required; contact Miner at 460-4590 or museumed@st-tel.net.



SAM DIETER/Colby Press Press

Facilitator Linda Garrett (above left) talked to Drew Starbuck about Nelson Toburen, the only pro ball player to graduate from Colby, at the Prairie Museum of Art and History, as he researched his character, getting ready to play him on stage. Cosette O'Brien (above right) talked about reporters taking her picture on a tractor as she took on the role of Marion Talley, a 20s-era opera singer who owned land near Levant. Carol Baker (lower right) helped Trinity Pfeifer with her character. Volunteer Rich Hawkins (bottom left) performed ad J.R. Horlacher, a mill owner who clearly believed he had the best flour in town.

