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Someone put a handicapped parking sign in the window at 1209 Main on Wednesday. The building is used by Southwestern Bell Telephone Co.

Photo by Janet Craft/The Goodland Daily News

Contentment thought to be reason for lowest voter turnout in decade

By Carl Manning
Associated Press Writer
TOPEKA — Despite the political hoopla, it was the lowest primary voter turnout in the past decade, and Secretary of State Ron Thornburgh thinks part of the reason is contentment.

Turnout was higher in many rural counties than urban areas, and the state's chief election officials said that may be because of a stronger sense of community in smaller towns. "There is something to be said for the courthouse square and knowing your neighbors," Thornburgh said Thursday. "In rural counties, you know the people you are voting for. You see them at the grocery store and the coffee shop. In urban areas, you know of them, but you don't know them," he said. In Tuesday's Democratic and Republican primaries in the 105 counties,

26.7 percent of the nearly 1.6 million registered voters cast ballots — the lowest percentage in the past decade. Previously, the decade's low was 29 percent in 1998. "As much as anything, I think it's people being contented — the economy is good, jobs are plentiful and their kids are winning their soccer games," Thornburgh said. "You see an increase in turnout because people want change, but if want to continue to have good times, you have the responsibility of putting people in office who can do this," he added. In the five largest counties in terms of voters, all but one had a percentage lower than the statewide figure. The exception was Shawnee County, with 29.1 percent, and Thornburgh attributed that to hotly contested primaries for sheriff.

The lowest turnout was Finney County, where 10.2 percent of the 15,294 voters went to the polls. The largest turnout was in Wallace County, with 70.2 percent of its 1,162 voters turning out. In Johnson County, only 23 percent of its nearly 300,000 voters went to the polls, despite a heated State Board of Education race and GOP congressional primary. Thornburgh said he was still trying to figure out that one. "We've been talking about it for a year, and voters were tired of talking about it and wanted to get on to paying the mortgage and the bills," he suggested of the state board race. Thornburgh said voters often think it doesn't matter who is elected, plus there's a growing number of uncontested races. Another problem, he said, is that many people feel one vote won't make that much difference. But sometimes one vote does matter. In one Democratic primary for a House seat, two candidates each got 348 votes, although that could change when the officials rule on challenged ballots. Thornburgh said he's concerned voter apathy isn't something that can be turned around quickly. "It's going to have to be of a societal shift. We can't slap a Band-Aid on something that needs a tourniquet," he said. "It's going to have to be a generational change in thought process. It's going to take some time."

Lawmakers discuss state's adoption, foster care system


TOPEKA (AP) — Lawmakers and private organizations want to know what will happen to the state's foster-care and adoption services after revelations that one provider is having serious financial problems. "We can't get the outcomes we want with a low-bid mentality," Sen. Sandy Praeger, R-Lawrence, said Thursday at a Statehouse hearing. "We're not talking about highways here; we're talking about kids." Praeger is chairwoman of the Joint Committee on Children's Issues. The hearing was called last month, after a private audit found that Lutheran Social Services, of Wichita, has about \$9.8 million in debts and only \$7.3 million in assets. Rep. Ethel Peterson, D-Dodge City, said legislators made a mistake in 1996 when they assumed that costly state services could be done better and less expensively by private, nonprofit agencies. Lutheran Social Services took over the job of finding adoptive homes for children in foster care shortly after the state began turning over child welfare

programs to the private sector. Earlier this year, the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services awarded the contract to Kansas Children's Service League, in Topeka. However, the league contracted with Lutheran Social Services for services for about 1,000 children, two-thirds of those in the adoption program. The new contract with the league is worth about \$25.7 million a year. Also, United Methodist Youthville, a state foster-care contractor, has had trouble making payments. Jane Alleva, a Youthville vice president, said the nonprofit agency that serves Wichita and western Kansas is about \$2 million behind in payments to subcontractors. However, Alleva said it could resolved if SRS would follow through on \$2 million it agreed to pay Youthville earlier this year. SRS officials say Lutheran Social Services' financial problems could be attributed to provisions of the old adoption contract, which has been corrected.

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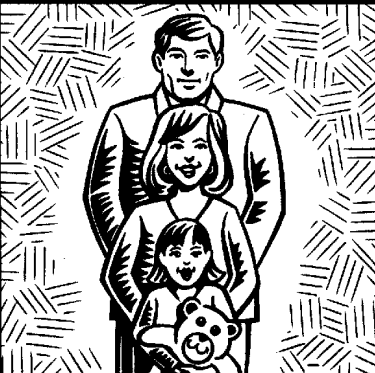
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Sheriff to turn up heat on drugs

As I unfolded *The Goodland Daily News* for July 25, I immediately noticed the four pictures of the candidates running for county sheriff. Each has good reasons for running. All say they will do better for our county. I believe each one of them sincerely cares about Sherman County. There were two comments which immediately caught my attention, Sheriff Whitson's "increase in aggression towards drugs and education for parents and children about drugs" and Dee Alber's "The sheriff's office would be more involved with the youth." I thought this was great! I realize there are many other important things going on in Sherman County, but are they more important? If you really think about it, many of those "other" things would maybe decrease if more attention was given to our youth and the issues which are facing them now, and the possibility of a better healthier drug-free future for them would increase. What kind of a future do we have if our youth are or become drug addicts, alcoholics, teen parents or involved with the law in a negative way? It's good that we place much emphasis on our junior high and high school levels, and help all which could benefit from it. But imagine what future



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leaders we can have if we begin the process from the time they are born to the time they have the ability to become healthy, responsible adults. There is much support and encouragement needed throughout all of that time. All of us in one way or another can provide those vital necessities. But we have to do it together. At this time, we have a few groups in Sherman County struggling very hard to help educate and prevent substance abuse, violence, teen pregnancy and other issues which harm our youth's future. But they are also struggling to get more community involvement. Back in April, one of those groups, the Community Health Assessment Process, held a meeting concerning these issues, hoping that they could get more people focused on how and what we as parents and concerned citizens and city and county leaders could do together to make something positive happen for our youth.

They advertised well and also sent out 210 letters for this meeting to county, city, and school leaders as well as community leaders which deal with youth. They asked that the meeting information be shared with their staff, co-workers and other organizations. Apart from our group of seven, only three new people showed up. I only mention this because we each play a critical part in what groups like this are doing. The last thing any of us want or need is another meeting, but when we all work together we make the load lighter on others as well as ourselves and maybe collaborating can eliminate some of the meetings, stress and frustration we tend to feel, especially if we are targeting the same issues. Hope that all candidates running for office, not just for sheriff, do place emphasis on these dangers which are taking our future from us. Law enforcement and juvenile authorities cannot do it alone. "There are no real "hopeless" cases among children....just adults who have given up hope." — *Malcolm L. Smith*

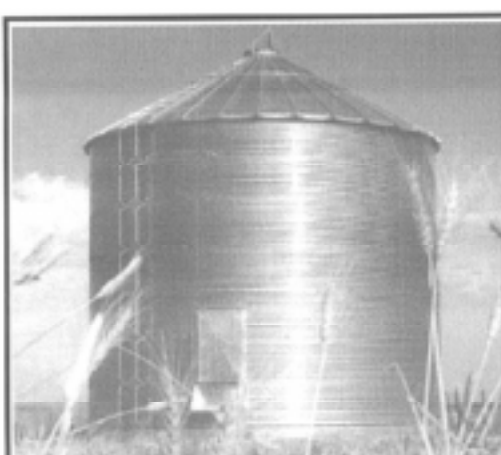
People are warned to stay inside as thickening smoke takes Montana

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — Scores of wildfires have forced beleaguered firefighters to give up ground as officials across western Montana warned people to stay inside and out of the thickening smoke. Fifteen major fires were burning on 100,000 acres in the state, and hundreds of homes were evacuated in the Bitterroot Valley, where heavy smoke cut visibility on stretches of highways to zero. In Nevada, a firefighting helicopter crashed near Elko, killing one crew member and injuring three other people shortly after takeoff late Thursday. One crew member remained in serious condition Friday; the pilot and a fuel truck driver who ran to help were treated and released. Nearly 62,000 wildfires have been reported across the nation this year, scorching nearly 3.8 million acres. In Seattle, Assistant Interior Secretary Sylvia Baca called it the worst fire season in 50 years. "We're thinking this is shaping up to be a reference point for years to come in terms of its severity," said Baca, who oversees the Bureau of Land Management and its 264 million acres of public land in the West. Baca said the population in the West has risen dramatically in the past decade so there are more homes and structures to fuel fires. She said the season could last for at least another month. There were more than 60 large fires

burning Friday across more than 650,000 acres of the West, and forecasts called for continued dry and hot conditions with the potential for lightning-packed thunderstorms. More than 300 families have been forced out of their homes in the Bitterroot Valley, a lush stretch of land in southwestern Montana along the Idaho line. The Blodgett Trailhead fire northwest of Hamilton grew to 1,700 acres and there were additional evacuations Thursday. County officials have declared a state of emergency because of the smoke. "The increased fire activity is being experienced throughout the forest, and in some areas firefighters have been forced to come off the fire lines," Bitterroot National Forest officials said. Fire conditions were predicted at the worst possible level, known as "red flag," Friday, with temperatures in the 90s and blustery winds. The entire southwestern Montana zone raised its fire-danger rating to "extreme" on Thursday. It previously reached that level in 1994 and 1988, officials said. Farther south, near Jackson, Wyo., a brief downpour Thursday slowed a 3,100-acre wildfire, but 200 people were no closer to returning to their homes, cabins and campsites in the Bridger-Teton National Forest on Friday. The lack of rain in northwestern Wyoming is close to what it was in 1988, the year of the devastating Yellowstone National Park fires.

In central Idaho, nearly 600 soldiers from Fort Hood, Texas, wrapped up two days of firefighter training and streamed into already burned areas of the Burgdorf Junction fire to begin mopping up. The soldiers' arrival freed up experienced firefighters to battle the stubborn blaze that had ballooned to 17,000 acres by Friday. Six Blackhawk helicopters joined the crew, dropping water and flame retardant on hotspots. Outside Reno, crews corralled a fire that damaged six homes even as other lightning-sparked blazes flared up across northern Nevada — some burning virtually unchecked. Gary Zunino, northern regional manager for the Nevada Division of Forestry, said the number of people and equipment to battle the flames was dwindling. "The fires are going to move fast and get big fast," he said. "Everybody in the West is fighting for the same resources." Forest Service Chief Mike Dombek toured the Idaho and Montana fire lines Thursday and promised adequate resources for fire crews. "This is top on our radar screen," Dombek said. Approximately 20,000 civilian and military firefighters are at work from 46 states and Canada. In Montana, 270 Army and Air National Guard troops worked their first shifts this week after a crash course in firefighting.


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