

Child support to be investigated

TOPEKA (AP) — Legislators decided to investigate the processing of child support checks, even as the state's top social services official insisted the system is working.

The House and Senate Judiciary committees scheduled a joint hearing for Jan. 22 to question Janet Schallansky, secretary of social and rehabilitation services.

Senate Chairman John Vratil announced the meeting Thursday to colleagues just hours after Schallansky told reporters only a small percentage of child support payments aren't being processed correctly.

Tier Technologies Inc., a private contractor, has processed child support payments for SRS at the Kansas Payment Center in Topeka since Sept. 29. SRS acknowledged a processing backlog in October.

Legislators say they continue to get calls from constituents whose checks arrive late or not at all.

"There's still problems," said Rep. Ruby Gilbert, D-Wichita.

Before Sept. 29, district courts and SRS handled the payments, but the state changed its system to comply with a 1996 federal law requiring states to centralize the processing of child support payments.

Schallansky said that during the past 60 days, only 2 percent to 3 percent of payments have been handled in other than a routine manner. She said that percentage has been dropping since the processing center opened.

The center processes about 300,000 payments each month, meaning between 6,000 and 9,000 aren't being handled in a routine manner.

"We think the Payment Center is working correctly," she said. "We still have a few problems, but that's the nature of the program."

Schallansky said she remains concerned about the small percentage not routinely processed.

"If you're waiting for a check, 30 days seems like a long time," she told reporters.

Vratil, R-Leawood, offered a different assessment.

"We had a good system of child support until this year," he said. "Now we've got a botched-up system."

House Minority Leader Jim Garner said SRS officials didn't do enough preparation before switching to the new system.

"This thing was just kind of slapped together," said Garner, D-Coffeyville.

In other action Thursday, members of the Senate Natural Resources Committee said the state doesn't have to appease federal officials on water policy thanks to a recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling.

Also, the state's chief utility watchdog told the Senate Utilities Committee said the Kansas Corporation Commission isn't reviewing natural gas contracts closely enough.

Small schools might have to merge

STUDY, from Page 1

gestion, kind of a nudge, but not an absolute dictum because they'll meet with a lot of resistance."

There's no logical reason to merge districts, Garner said, because it won't improve education or save the state or local governments money.

"If they consolidate are they going to have better schools? Research says no," he said. "Will it save money? History says no."

It's proven, Garner said, that smaller schools have higher test scores. He

added that if districts merge, it will cost money to build new facilities for extra bodies and to transport students hundreds of miles each day.

Spencer said he hopes lawmakers make up their minds quickly about whether to take action this year or not.

"They need to make a decision fast as to whether they will pursue it this year," he said. "It will help smaller districts plan."

Spencer said consolidation means he and the rest of the district's staff will be out of jobs. Many teachers and staff would move out of town, he said, caus-

ing a further decline in population that would hurt Winona's economy.

"The school is the focal point of a city," he said, adding that cities with closed schools, such as Edson, Kanorado and Gem, have dwindled away to near nothing.

Garner said losing the school could kill Brewster.

There is a telephone company in town and two grain elevators, he said, but the school is the largest employer in the district.

"There goes \$750,000 to \$800,000 in income," he said.

Clinton apologizes for deaths in Korea

WASHINGTON (AP) — Again offering his regrets to the people of South Korea, President Clinton said Friday the United States has "done our best to do the right thing" in the No Gun Ri incident. He insisted the Army has not "whitewashed" its conclusion that American soldiers were not ordered to kill civilians at No Gun Ri.

Clinton still did not offer an apology, as No Gun Ri survivors and family members had hoped, and told reporters he believes the regrets he extended are sufficient.

"I don't think there's any difference in the two words," Clinton said. "They both mean we are profoundly sorry for what happened and things happened which were wrong."

Some survivors and family members denounced the Army's finding as a "whitewash." Clinton said he specifically ordered against that. He also said he discussed the report with President Kim Dae-jung on Thursday

evening.

"I certainly told the investigators I didn't want the investigation whitewashed," Clinton said. "We did our best to find out what happened, and to determine the facts as best we could."

Help to conserve energy

SAVING, from Page 1

during the day. This will allow you to use energy only when you need it.

- If you have a fireplace, close the damper when you aren't using the fireplace to prevent heat from escaping up the chimney.

- Have a professional check your

furnace to ensure it is adjusted properly and operating at peak efficiency.

- Consider installing a high efficiency, two-stage furnace. The benefits include increased efficiency and a more consistent airflow, resulting in a more comfortable home.

— Information provided by UtiliCorp United



Harold Gillihan, an employee of Peoples Natural Gas in Goodland, demonstrated Friday morning how he reads a gas meter using a hand-held meter reader in front of Bauman's Norwest Recreation in Goodland. Customers are experiencing high natural gas prices this winter. Photo by Janet Craft/The Goodland Daily News

Natural gas prices continue to climb

GAS, from Page 1

said, natural gas providers are able to set the price, knowing people have no choice but to buy.

He said he expects that once fresh supplies come into the market, prices will level off, but gas from the new wells could take 18 to 24 months to reach customers.

UtiliCorp doesn't know when prices might go down, and they can't predict the market, Minter said. But, he said, they don't anticipate the price staying as high in the summer, when demand for natural gas goes down.

Minter said natural gas costs started to increase in April 2000, but customers didn't see an increase until cold weather came and they needed to heat their homes or businesses.

He said customers can expect to see as much as a 75 percent increase in the supply portion of their energy bill.

The current cost of gas is close to \$9

per 1,000 cubic feet, he said. Last January, it cost \$2 per 1,000 cubic feet.

UtiliCorp says they don't benefit from the high prices, as they pass the wholesale cost of gas onto customers without a markup. These are the wholesale prices they pay for gas supplies to deliver to customers.

To help customers, Minter said, the company buys gas from hundreds of suppliers, allowing them to obtain competitive prices, which results in more reasonable prices for the customers.

He said they offer payment arrangements for customers who are experiencing financial hardships and the company has a payment plan called

StreamLine that allows customers to pay the same amount for energy every month, regardless of the weather or the customer's usage pattern.

In addition, he said, they are taking actions to increase funds for energy assistance and low-income weatherization.

December has been the highest-priced month for gas, Minter said, when prices hit \$10 on the market.

The two-month period of November and December were two of the coldest months on record for the mid-continent, which includes Kansas, he said.

He said a lot of what we're seeing is historically high prices and historically cold temperatures for two months.

	Walt Disney's The Emperor's New Groove (G) \$2.50 Sun. matinee & Tues.	Bring this AD to the theatre for \$1 Off on a large popcorn & 2 med. drinks. EXP. 12/31/01	Movie Bucks Make Great Gifts! Fri. & Sat. 7:00 & 9:00 • Sun 1:30 & 7:00 Mon.-Thurs. 7:00 Sherman 1203 MAIN - PHONE 899-8103 www.goodlandnet.com/movies
--	---	--	--

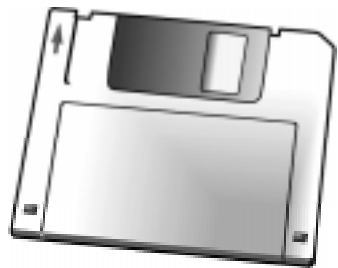
Ready to explore the wide world of the Web?

What do you have to do?

nwkansas.com is your key to the Internet. We offer reliable service, fast modems and full access to the Internet, the World Wide Web and E-mail all in one package for one low monthly fee*. We have reliable customer service from to help you get connected, and plenty of lines to take your calls. We are the local Internet Service Provider with people who can answer your questions. In most cases, you can be hooked up today. We have the latest, fastest modems, and plenty of lines to answer your call. (We try to keep our customer ratio at 8 to 1.)

*Special rate offer

With a payment of \$99.80 (four months base service) we give you a month free service and no set-up fee (\$19.96 per month average rate. We are offering an annual rate of \$198 (\$16.50 per month average).



nwkansas.com

Local Tech Support • Same-Day Connection* • Friendly People to Help

The Goodland Daily News • 1205 Main, Goodland, Kansas, 67735 • 785 899-2338

*In most cases; we'll try anyway.



We can connect you tonight... not next week!

Infinite variety on the 'Net

There's a whole new world waiting out there.

Whatever you're interested in, the Internet, with its millions of postings and services, has it. Weather, time of day, art, archives, news, hobbies . . . If you can imagine it, someone has put it on the Internet.

Use it for business. Use it for school. Use it for pleasure. Use it just to find out what's out there. Pick a topic and search the entire World Wide Web for it ... in just seconds.

E-mail for fun and profit

E-mail is fast, affordable and inexpensive. From your computer, you can send and receive messages anywhere in the world . . . for no charge . . . once you have an Internet connection.

