



There's not much left of the Hutfles Construction and Northwest Kansas Communications buildings following a fire on Thursday night. Three Colby firefighters continued to assess damage today after being up all night battling the blaze.
Photo by Patty Decker/The Colby Free Press

Blaze levels two businesses in Colby

FIRE, from Page 1

I don't think she made it."

Hutfles said he lost his business pickup and lots of tools in the building, an 18-foot boat, golf cart, golf clubs and many other items.

Both Johnson and Hutfles said they were stunned that everything was gone.

"I feel like somebody just hit me in the belly," Johnson said. "This fire sure took the wind out of my sails. I had just installed a new air conditioning and furnace and was looking at more remodeling upstairs.

"It (the building) was starting to look half-decent — but it doesn't look so good this morning."

Hutfles said he started his business in his garage more than 10 years ago, and moved to Fourth Street in 1994. He remodeled the building in 1996.

"I feel like a farmer who loses all his crops to a freeze," he said. "I lost everything."

Although both owners had insurance, the fire left them feeling distraught. Johnson said he plans to start anew, but today said he is not sure when, where or how.

"I have too many customers in my business that need these services," he said, adding that he works mostly with telephone systems for businesses and schools. His building, an 80-foot-by-50-foot wood-framed, stucco structure, housed his communication busi-

ness in the front, with the back part storing pleasure-type vehicles and hobby items.

Hutfles' building, also 80 by 50, was a wood-framed, metal clad building with a common wall between it and Johnson's.

"I really haven't had time to decide whether or not I will rebuild at this location or relocate somewhere else," Hutfles said.

He did say that Darrell Pabst of Colby has agreed to let him set up shop temporarily in one of the buildings he owns out by Beulah Cemetery.

McLemore said it was too soon to tell where the fire's origin was. "The fire marshal will help us determine that over the next few days," he said.

Farm bill on congressman's agenda

MORAN, from Page 1

programs.

While no farm bill will ever be perfect, Murphy said, people have said this one may come closer.

"There's no ultimate fix," he said, "but a lot of people are pleased or at least positive and feel it's a step in the right direction."

Improving rural health care is one of Moran's biggest priorities, Murphy said, and a topic on a lot of people's

Suit ban was lifted by U.S.

FARGO, N.D. (AP)—Farm Service Agency directors in 15 states were told not to foreclose on loans held by farmers who are suing the government over a decade-old bailout, but the order was later rescinded, court papers show.

More than 100 farmers from 16 states claim the U.S. Agriculture Department is making them pay money they do not owe under terms of farm aid packages passed in the 1980s that helped them write off or restructure government loans.

Carolyn Cooksie, deputy USDA administrator for farm loan programs, said in a July 27 memo to FSA offices that they must not act on 60 loans held by the farmers unless they get approval from the national office, and should ask prosecutors to suspend any foreclosure already filed.

But government lawyers said in a court filing last week that the memo "was issued in error and has since been withdrawn."

Farmers who wrote off debt had to sign 10-year agreements after the bailouts, and the terms of those deals are now in dispute. Court papers say a total of \$4.3 million is at stake.

The government says farmers owe half the amount by which their land increased in value since the agreements were signed.

But farmers argue the government is only entitled to that share if they had sold their land or stopped farming since the deals were struck. "Any plaintiff who did not sell real property or cease farming during the 10-year term of the agreement does not owe any (money) to USDA," said Sarah Vogel, attorney for the farmers.

Farmers asked U.S. District Judge

minds.

He said Moran is co-chairman of the Rural Health Care Coalition—a bipartisan group of 180 legislators — and sponsored a bill earlier this year to help small hospitals retain quality doctors and nurses and keep home health care service providers in business.

The coalition's goal, Murphy said, is to make sure that rural areas are included when Congress is considering health care policy.

While gas prices have dropped this

summer, Murphy said, high energy prices are still putting a strain on farmers and other citizens. He said Moran realizes finding alternative energy sources is important — he recently sponsored a bill to help plants that generate wind power — and believes the U.S. should produce more oil and rely less on foreign countries.

Moran's priorities are agriculture, health care, transportation, veterans and small business, Murphy said, but his main objective is to keep rural America alive while not damaging its appeal.

"He wants to preserve the way of life here," he said, "maintain the values, while making sure that when kids go off to college they want to and can come back."

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