

Fire agreement voted down

FIRE, from Page 1

There are several options it can take, including soliciting applications and conducting interviews or accepting nominations. The new commissioner will fill the rest of Zimmerman's term, which lasts until April 2014.

- Gerber said the city is looking at applying for a "Safe Routes to School" grant. The grant includes money for planning and construction to improve sidewalks to encourage children to walk to school.
- The commission looked over the

annual electric rate review. The city staff reviews electric users each year to determine what class they fall under based on usage. For example, all businesses start out under Commercial I. They pay a monthly charge of \$19.73, rather than playing demand. If a business' usage goes above a certain amount over a three-month period, they are moved up to Commercial II, under which they pay based on demand.

Rusty Fritz, owner of The Basement and the building it's housed in, spoke to the commission. He said he had just been moved to Commercial II, which

would cost him a lot more. He said the businesses he allows to rent the building are likely putting the usage over the top on the meter, and asked if he could install a second meter that would only record The Basement's usage.

City Clerk Mary Volk said he would be able to do that, but he would have to pay for the electrical work himself and would have to hire a licensed electrician to rewire the building. The new meter would start out under Commercial I until it is reviewed next year.

Republicans plan caucus

CAUCUS, from Page 1

Goodland. The doors will open for check-in at 9:30 a.m. At 10 a.m., voters will hear short presentations by representatives of each participating candidate and the first round of voting will happen soon after. This process will be repeated again at 11 a.m. and noon.

Voters wishing to participate in this process must have been registered as a Republican by last Friday and must provide photo identification at the caucus location.

Those wishing to officially support or repre-

sent a candidate must have written authorization from their candidate's organization and this must be presented at the Caucus.

"We welcome all candidates or their appointed representatives to come and inform the voters of Sherman County of their attributes," Schields said. "Please contact me directly to obtain the needed approval form. We expect a good turnout and hope to learn much about the candidates. Please join us."

For more information, call Schields at (785) 821-1446

Legislature nearing halfway point, tackling water usage policies

The pace of business in the Kansas House of Representatives saw another noticeable uptick this week as we debated 25 bills in anticipation of our first major session deadline.

Next Friday marks the official halfway point of the 2012 session, known as "turnaround." All bills, apart from specific exempt bills, must be passed out of one chamber by turnaround in order to be considered for the remainder of the session. If non-exempt bills have not passed out of the House or Senate they can no longer be considered. Committees are doing a great job of sending bills to the full House for further consideration and I expect we will have a substantial workload next week in advance of the turnaround deadline. Hard to believe we will have completed half of the legislative session.

Kansas Water Policy Reform (SB 272 and HB 2516)

The Ogallala aquifer is the primary source of water in the western



rick billinger
state rep.

third of Kansas. Counties located above the Aquifer account for approximately two-thirds of the state's agriculture economy and preserving the Aquifer is key to the economic future of Western Kansas and entire state. Without water from the Aquifer, agriculture and related business would not be sustained, manufacturing would slow and towns in the area of the Ogallala would struggle to survive.

This week the House took up two pieces of legislation designed to improve state water policy. SB 272 allows for multi-year flex accounts to assist irrigators, landowners and other affected parties in periods of drought. This would give parties flexibility in using their water allo-

cation over a five year period. Years where individuals use more water than allocated can be set off by other years where the full allocation is not used.

HB 2516 extends the availability and permanency of the Water Bank Act. In the late 1990's, the Legislature passed the Water Bank Act allowing for two water banks in the state. A person with water rights can deposit a portion of their usage rights into the water bank for purchase. Currently, there is only one bank operating in central Kansas and it has not been put to great use. However, the potential for fracking in Kansas makes this a useful tool in ensuring oil producers have the water they need for the fracking procedures.

Workers Compensation (HB 2531)

HB 2531 creates a seven-member Workers Compensation and Em-

ployment Security Boards Nominating Committee to replace the current Administrative Law Judge Nominating and Review Committee and the Workers Compensation Board Nominating Committee. The Governor would have the responsibility of appointing all seven members of the Committee but requires member to be representatives of the following groups and officials: Secretary of Labor; Kansas Chamber of Commerce; National Federation of Independent Business; Kansas AFL-CIO; Society for Human Resource Management; Kansas Self-Insurers Association; and a representative from an employee organization or professional employee organization.

Committee meetings would be on an as needed basis to provide the Workers Compensation and Employment Security Board of Review appointing Authorities with nominees for appointments to the position of workers compensation administrative law judge or board

members and employment security board of review. No Committee action would take effect without the approval of two-thirds of the Committee.

Kansas Water Policy Reform (SB 272 and HB 2516)

Impacting many communities in the western half of the state, Kansas's water policy has become one of the main focuses of the 2012 legislative session and the executive branch priorities. Accordingly, the House has considered and will continue to work on a number of changes to existing water law to help sustain one of our most precious and declining resources. Without careful planning, we risk endangering the livelihood, and ultimately the economic stability, of Kansas' agricultural economy.

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Thank you for the honor of serving you. Representative Rick Billinger, 785-899-4700, rick.billinger@house.ks.gov

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