



Robin Jennison of Healy talked to Teresa David in the Sherman County treasurer's office during a visit to Goodland on Friday. Jennison is running for the Republican nomination for governor. Photo by Pat Schiefen/The Goodland Star-News

# Candidate makes stop in town to campaign

By Pat Schiefen  
The Goodland Star-News

A former House speaker, a long-time western Kansas farmers, and has thrown his hat into the political ring to run for governor. Robin Jennison of Healy, which is 37 miles south of Oakley and 16 miles east on K-4, stopped in Goodland on Friday to campaign and get his name out. Jennison said he has been farming and doing *Kansas Outdoors* radio shows for the six years since he has left the Legislature. Jennison said he thinks the top issue facing the state is school finance. People elect a governor to make the tough decisions, he said, and Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, a Democrat, has not done that. "I really don't think the governor has fulfilled her role as governor," he said. Jennison said when the Legislature passed a school finance bill in 2004 that Sebelius did not support, she did not veto it, so it went back to the Legislature. Basically, he said, she left it up to the courts to handle. He said the Legislature needs to

handle the problems of school finance where there is some accountability to the people. The courts don't worry about that, he said. "I do not support No Child Left Behind (federal education requirements)," said Jennison. He thinks each school board should decide its own priorities. Jennison said he spent 10 years in the Kansas Legislature starting in 1991. In 1995 he became the chairman of the Appropriations Committee. He became majority leader in 1997 and served as the Speaker of the House from 1999 to 2000. Other candidates so far in the Republican primary for governor are Sen. Jim Barnett, Emporia; Overland Park family advocate Ken Canfield; Prairie Village lawyer Timothy Pickell; Ozawkie lawyer Dennis Hawver; and Richard Rodewald of Eudora, a retired engineer. The people of western Kansas are going to have to make themselves heard if they want to keep their schools open, said Jennison. "With me as governor," he said, "I can make a difference."

# Graduate sings in opera chorus

By Sharon Corcoran  
The Goodland Star-News

A 2004 Goodland High School graduate spent over two weeks practicing with professional opera performers and had a "tremendous" on-stage experience last month in Wichita. Josef Felver, son of Jon and Elaine Felver of Goodland, said he had the experience of a lifetime working with a professional opera troupe and performing at the Century II Concert Hall in Wichita. Felver, a sophomore majoring in physics at Southwestern College in Winfield, was a member of the chorus in the opera "Lucia di Lammermoor," performed Saturday, Jan. 21, in Wichita. He also was on the Dean's Honor Roll for the fall semester at the college, earning at least a 3.7 grade point average. Dr. David Gardner, director of the chorus and assistant professor of music at Southwestern, chose the

chorus members. He asked Felver, who had been in the college's choir last year, to be in it. The chorus practiced two to three weeks with opera professionals, Felver said, before the performance for the Wichita Grand Opera. "I enjoyed it very much," he said. "It was a wonderful experience. Working with a professional troupe was very rewarding." The chorus sang different songs that were part of the same score, Felver said; there were no song titles. Chorus members had a cut up version of the score, he said, that just had the chorus' parts. The chorus' role was similar to a narrator, Felver said, in that they moved the story along by telling the audience what has happened. It was mostly a tool for having more music, he said. The chorus members rehearsed for two weeks and did things on their own over Christmas break, he

said, before working with the professionals in January. Felver had been on a couple of big stages before and compared Wichita's facilities favorably. Being on-stage was amazing, he said; the Century II building was impressive. It was a very professional atmosphere, he said, and performing there was rewarding. The opera was in Italian, Felver said, sung by tenors from Russia and Dallas, a bass from New York and a Russian soprano. The soprano, Larisa Yudina of Russia, is one of the better ones in this day and age, he said. The president and director of the opera were from Italy, Felver said; they really shipped people in for this. The chorus was made up of Kansas students. The opera might not be for everyone, he said; it lasted about three hours and was all in Italian. There were English subtitles, he said, and a synopsis in the program.

# Sunday weather causes accidents

Snow and ice Sunday evening caused several drivers to slid off I-70 and K-27 near Goodland, though no major injuries were reported. The Kansas Highway Patrol said the most serious accident happened 13 miles east of the east Goodland interchange on I-70. At 6:15 p.m., Trooper Bryan Wilson reported, Desmond Thornton, 50, of Austell, Ga., was passing another vehicle when his truck's trailer slid as he

was trying to get back in the driving lane. The truck and trailer slide into the north ditch, where the truck jack knifed and rolled onto the driver's side, trapping Thornton.

McB's Wrecker moved the truck. Goodland Fire Rescue and an ambulance from the Goodland Regional Medical Center went to the accident.

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# City puts renewal of telephones on hold

By Tom Betz  
The Goodland Star-News

City commissioners tabled renewal of the AT&T telephone franchise Friday morning because there was no agreement with the phone company on the details of the franchise. City Manger Wayne Hill told the commissioners that AT&T, formerly known as SBC Corp. and Southwestern Bell, has suggested an ordinance, but that the city wanted all its franchise agreements to be the same. City Attorney Jeff Mason said he had been in contact with lawyers for the phone company, but he had not received any response from them by that morning. "We made the agreement the same as we did with S&T," Mason said, "but they said AT&T (the new name for the combined SBC Corp. and AT&T) would not approve that and sent back what they wanted to be passed. "We feel it is important to have our franchises be the same. We have right-of-way language in the franchise which AT&T wants to have in a separate ordinance, and the definitions are shorter than what we have used." "Why is this different?" asked Mayor Rick Billinger. "They (AT&T) want to change all their agreements," Mason said. "They want a one-year agreement

with an automatic renewal. I checked with the state, but they do not regulate franchises." "What happens if we do not get an agreement?" Billinger asked. "What will it affect all the people who have phone service from them now." Mason said franchise law requires there be an agreement. He said without an agreement, customers would get a notice that the service would be no longer available in the City of Goodland. "Why do they want a separate agreement for right of way," Billinger asked. Mason said he could not tell because he has not seen the right-of-way language the phone company wants. "We have to look at what they are doing in changing from a five year to a one year," Garcia said. "That might be good for us." City Clerk Mary Volk said the S&T franchise comes up for renewal in June. Mason said one option is to make the changes with the AT&T franchise and then change the S&T one in June. Commissioner Josh Dechant said there was right-of-way language in the current agreement, and wondered why AT&T wanted it changed. Rich Simon, public works director, said the city wants to be sure it

has the same rights as under the current language. "We want to be able to run lines and if they need to be moved, it is at their expense," Simon said. Darin Neufeld, who handles engineering work for the city through Evans, Bierly, Hutchison and Associates, said in other towns, his firm has seen changes under the franchises that when lines have to be moved, the phone company would not have to pay and it would be up to the city. Mason said the city is not under a time crunch because the current franchise does not expire until March 31. "We are not changing the fees and do not have to publish it 60 days in advance," Mason said. "We can get more information for you, but wanted you to be aware of what we are facing." "We can table this," Hill added, "but we would like to see their right-of-way language." "We don't have anything to approve," Billinger said. "I think anytime someone comes in and wants to tell the city what to do something is up," Commissioner Dave Daniels said. "I move to table." The motion was unanimous, and Mason and Hill said they will try to have more information for the next commission meeting at 7:30 a.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 21.

# City health insurance drops but deductible remains same

By Tom Betz  
The Goodland Star-News

Deductibles and office visits costs will remain the same for city employees this year, but the cost of the health insurance will dip by about 3 percent, city commissioners were told Friday morning. Charlie Krull, area representative for Blue Cross and Blue Shield, was at the meeting to give the commission the good news and to present the city a certificate for being with Blue Cross and Blue Shield for 22 years. He said a change in benefits the commission approved two years ago, moving from a drug card to a deductible 50-50 prescription plan, has had a positive impact on the costs. The 50-50 plan has a \$50 deductible and then drugs are reimbursed on a 50 percent basis, Krull said. "The employees are to be commended," he said, "because they are probably choosing the generic more than the name brand. This means your prescription cost is running about \$30,000 below where it was four years ago." He said the plan continues to have a \$10 office visit payment, and the plan pays for the first \$300 of lab services without a deductible. The stop loss for each employee contract paid by the city is \$15,000, he said, which means the liability on a family is \$15,000 rather than by person.

"The plan covers all charges made within the contract period," Krull said. "That is an important safety net with the Blue Cross plan. Blue Cross begins direct payments when the claim level hits \$15,000. It is not a plan where the city has to pay the costs and wait for reimbursement." He said there is a change in the lifetime limit for coverage, increasing it from \$1 million to \$5 million. This will cost 30 cents a month per contract. "We are changing all plans to this," he said. "It is a reality about how large some of the health claims can get." He said claims for the city should increase about 2.2 percent over the year, but the administrative costs will drop by 8.3 percent. That will make the overall cost for the year drop by about 2.7 percent. "The city will pay Blue Cross about 30 percent less than you did for administration and stop loss four years ago," he said. He said the claims for last year are down, but that they usually increase at the end of the year when more people are reaching their deductible, and the benefits paid out increase. One reason for the decrease in administrative costs, Krull said, was that all the forms are now available through the company web site. "Mary (Volk) has access to all forms and things she needs," he

said. "This has reduced our administrative costs. We used to have three floors of supplies. We have saved an incredible amount of money and paper." Volk said the employees are happy with the benefit package. "This is amazing," said Mayor Rick Billinger, "It shows that our city employees are doing a great job of using their benefit." Commissioner Dave Daniels asked Volk how much of an increase had been included in the budget. Volk said it was about 15 percent. Commissioner Josh Dechant agreed it was good news to hear health costs going down even by a slight amount. He made a motion to approve the Blue Cross and Blue Shield contract for the next year, which is effect the first of March.

## corrections

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