

Wheat fields not as good as last year

By **KIMBERLY BRANDT**

Wheat fields around Oberlin are behind where they were last year at this time, while some have a shorter stand and others are spotty.

At this time last year, said Ty Gerlits, agronomy production specialist for Farmland Industries, the wheat was looking good. The fields had gotten some moisture over the winter and had been planted in better conditions. The sun was out last year, helping the crop to grow, he said, but then went downhill with the drought.

The area has received more moisture in the first 3 1/2 months than the area got in 2000, with 3.37 inches this year and 3.11 inches a year ago, he said, but it's not a dramatic difference.

Mr. Gerlits said it was so dry during planting season in the fall, it was like hitting a brick wall when he would try to test for moisture. He can now stick the probe almost six feet into the ground.

The moisture hasn't hurt the wheat after a dry spell last year. Some fields had a good profile going into winter, he said, and the snow this winter mostly stayed on the fields rather than blowing into the ditches. It melted into the ground. While the bad conditions at planting time didn't help the wheat, Mr. Gerlits said it was the nasty, dry, cold

weather which made it slower to come up in the spring.

He said some fields are thin, others have plants of varying size and there are some where none of the plants have pushed through the surface. Usually wheat will germinate in the fall and then become dormant over the winter, he said, but the ground still soaks the moisture in and helps the plant when it breaks dormancy in the spring.

Reports from the Kansas Agricultural Statistics Service shows that only 3 percent of the state's wheat crop is in excellent condition, 30 percent is good, 41 percent is fair, 17 percent is poor and 9 percent is very poor.

Mr. Gerlits said farmers are getting back into the fields now on days when it has been dry enough.

Most are spraying wheat for weeds and putting nitrogen on the plants. He said since it was so dry last fall, the weeds aren't bad, but they are thriving on the moisture now.

Fertilizer is being sprayed on most fields for a second time. Mr. Gerlits said most farmers plant on nitrogen and by spraying the fields now it gives the wheat an extra boost for the growing period.

The idea is to get the fertilizer on before the wheat joints and goes into the

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Charges filed in ecstasy case

By **KIMBERLY BRANDT**

Two 16-year-olds were charged Thursday in juvenile court for allegedly selling ecstasy pills to Oberlin teenagers, although no arrests had been made in the case.

The first incident was in March, but a date was not pinpointed in the complaint, when David Eldridge, 16, allegedly sold ecstasy to Isaac Shaw, 15, and John Micheal Fordham, 16.

The complaint against Eldridge includes two counts of "feloniously and intentionally" selling the hallucinogenic drug, methylenedioxymphetamine, to Fordham and Shaw. All four charges are level 3 drug non-person felonies.

Fordham was charged with selling the drug to Cole Stragey, 16, at Decatur Community High School on or about March 23. This is a level 2 drug non-person felony.

County Attorney Steve Hirsch, who filed the charges, said he doesn't know what the consequence could be in juvenile court, since they are different than what an adult would face. The penalty, he said, is up to the judge.

Drug charges range from level 1 to level 4 felonies, with level 1 being the most serious. The charges against Fordham are level 2 because it was done on school grounds, said Mr. Hirsch.

While juvenile records for youths under 14 are closed, those of older youths are part of the open court record

after the Kansas Legislature changed the law in 1996, effective July 1, 1997.

Two ecstasy pills allegedly were sold to teens during a dance on Friday, March 23, sponsored by two school groups TACT (Teens Acting and Caring Together) and the Kayettes. Members of the TACT board have said that they don't condone the drug sales and wish the incident wouldn't have taken place, but have little control over things that happen at a dance.

Oberlin Police Officer Troy Haas said Monday that from the investigation of the first incident, it was determined there were four later sales but the quantity of pills hasn't been revealed.

Mr. Hirsch said no arrests have been made because they will summon the youths to court for a first appearance, where the charges will be read and explained to them. Mr. Hirsch said it is rare for an arrest warrant to be issued for a juvenile because they usually stay with their parents until action is taken.

After the first appearance, Mr. Hirsch said, there will be a preliminary hearing, which is supposed to take place within 10 days, but often gets postponed. At that time, it will be determined whether there is enough evidence to go forward with the case.

There will then be an arraignment, where Eldridge and Fordham will be able to state if they are guilty or not and then the case will go to trial.

Mr. Hirsch said he doesn't know how

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Let's go fly a kite

WITH THE WIND IN THEIR HAIR and kites in the air, 11 youngsters took to the fields Saturday to enjoy the good weather and a hot dog roast. Karyn Jordan, 13, (top) showed her skill with a stunt kite after things got going. Before taking off for the fields, however, Kyle Huntley, 9, (below left) discussed the finer points of kite flying with Tena Jernigan, 8. Meanwhile Megan Huntley, 6, (right) was all ready to get her kite into the air. The party was sponsored by the Oberlin Church of Christ and Bill and Carol Duncan, who handed out hot dogs and s'mores after the activities.

— Herald staff photos by Cynthia Haynes



Census figures show boom and bust here

By **TOM BETZ**

County figures from the 2000 Census show the slow, steady decline in population continued for northwest Kansas, with a loss of 5 percent in nine counties over the past 10 years.

City figures indicate slower declines and even some gains, but these figures just confirm the continued movement from the countryside into the towns.

The U.S. Census Bureau has historic figures for counties going back to the first census here in 1860, but figures from 1900 to 2000 have been examined for nine counties in northwest Kansas: Cheyenne, Decatur, Gove, Greeley, Logan, Rawlins, Sherman, Thomas and Wallace.

Total population for the nine was 30,642 in 1900, and in 100 years has grown by 10 percent to 33,940 in the 2000 census. That sounds like progress, but the 1930 census showed a higher-water mark of 52,292 people in the nine, which steadily declined over the next 70 years for a total drop of 35 percent.

Decatur County

The boom years for the High Plains, except for Decatur County, were from 1900 to 1930, with eight of the coun-

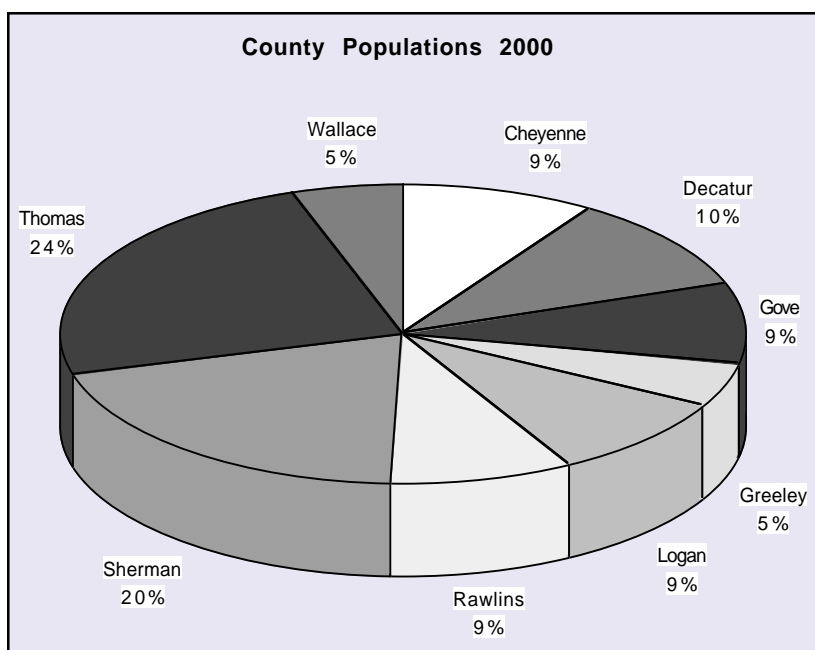
ties showing increases in population in the 1910, 1920 and 1930 census figures.

Decatur had the largest population of the area at the turn of the century, with 9,234 in 1900. That was the high-water mark, with drops over the next 30 years to 8,866 in 1930. After the 1930 peak, the decline becomes more dramatic so that by 1980, the county had less than half the population present in 1900. With the 2000 census, Decatur is now listed as one of the fastest shrinking counties in Kansas, losing 62 percent of the 1900 population down to 3,472.

Decatur had 30 percent of the total area population in 1900, dropped to 17 percent by the 1930 report and down to 10 percent with the 2000 census.

At the turn of the 19th century, farming was very big business in Decatur County. There were nearly as many farms as there were quarter-sections of land to farm. There were over 100 active school districts, and the county also had a railroad to move produce to market.

The proximity of the railroad brought both merchandise and people into the area to swell the numbers and put



Decatur in a position of importance in northwest Kansas.

As population continued to move westward after 1900, the numbers could not be sustained and as the mechanization of farming began to develop, the number of farmers began to decline, which continues even today.

Sherman County

Sherman County hit the turn of the century with a modest population of 3,341, and representing about 11 percent of the area's total. The county grew pretty rapidly over the next 30 years, more than doubling to 7,400 in 1930. (Please see CENSUS on Page 8A)

Senator stops to talk about Kansas future

By **KIMBERLY BRANDT**

Only hours after learning that 24 American crew members were going to be freed by China, Sen. Pat Roberts met with about 18 people for breakfast at the LandMark Inn, sharing the good news and talking about the future of Kansas.

Sen. Roberts said the No. 1 concern since the U.S. plane had collided with a Chinese fighter jet, forcing the crew to make an emergency landing in China, had been the welfare of the crew. Last Wednesday, he awoke to the welcome news that the crew would be sent home after 12 days on a Chinese island.

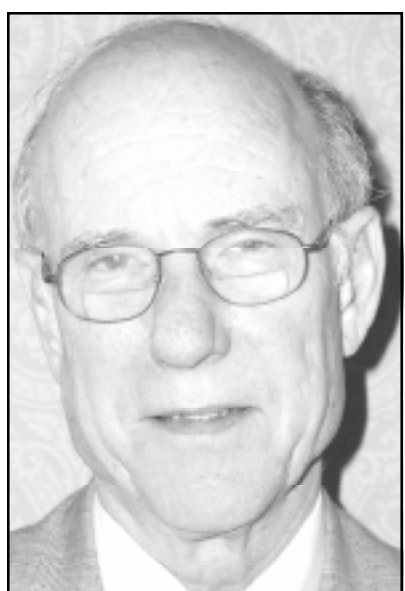
After the crew has returned, he said it will be important to work on getting the spy plane which they were flying

World Trade Union. There will have to be a vote on whether that can happen. He said he guessed that vote will be harder now with what has recently happened between the U.S. and China. And trade with China is vital to Kansas farmers, he said.

The senator said that the Senate had been able to pass a budget before going on recess, although the president wasn't able to get all the tax relief he wanted.

Sen. Roberts has been in office since 1996 and sits on the Agriculture, Armed Services, Education, and Labor and Pensions committees, plus the Select Intelligence Committee, and is the chairman of the Select Ethics Committee.

He met with people in Oberlin as one of his stops in northwestern Kansas, part of a year-long "listening tour" of



Sen. Pat Roberts

all 105 Kansas counties. After a brief talk, he opened the floor up for questions.

One man said he works with elderly people and is hearing from them that they can't pay their drug bills and ev-

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Goodland pilot returns home

By **RACHEL MISCALL**

Lt. j.g. Jeff Vignery said he had already received Jesus Christ as his personal savior, but when the Navy spy plane he was helping to fly went into a nose dive, he said a quick prayer, taking Jesus into his heart again.

"I wanted to make sure," he said. "Just in case I hadn't done it right the first time."

Lt. Vignery, a 1992 Goodland High School graduate, is one of 24 American officers held in China for 11 days after their EP-E3 surveillance plane collided with a Chinese fighter jet over the South China Sea.

Chinese officials released the crew members on Wednesday and they returned to the Naval Air Station in Whidbey Island, Wash., on Saturday, greeted by their families and 7,000 other cheering Americans. The \$80 million plane is still on Hainan Island,

but U.S. and Chinese officials plan to meet Wednesday to discuss its return and other issues.

Jeff's parents, Ron and Judi Vignery of Goodland, flew to Washington on Friday along with his brother and two sisters. Ron Vignery, a Goodland lawyer, said he was overcome by emotion when his son, who had just flown into the air base with the 23 other crew members, walked up to him.

"I couldn't talk," he said. "I was crying. Everybody was crying."

From his home on Whidbey Island on Monday, Jeff Vignery said he thanks God for placing guardian angels on each of the crew members' shoulders. He said a higher power helped them through the 11-day ordeal, which began when the planes collided, destroying the Chinese jet and knocking the nose off the U.S. plane.

"All we could see was water through the plane's front window," he said. "At that point we all thought we were going to die."

Lt. Vignery, 27, was commissioned as a Navy pilot in 1997. He said after a quick prayer, he began helping the pilot, Lt. Shane Osborn, get control over the plane. The craft diving toward the water below and shaking violently, and Lt. Vignery was making Mayday calls.

The accident happened at 22,500 feet, he said, and the plane fell 7,500 feet before he and Osborn were able to get the wings level.

But, Lt. Vignery said, the plane continued to fall and the crew got ready to bail out.

"It wasn't until around 10,000 feet," he said, "that we had gained enough control to start discussing the situation with the pilot and flight engineers."

He said the crew started going down the ditching check list, preparing for a water landing, and he and the two other

(Please see PILOT on Page 8A)



Lt. Vignery

* Senator answers questions

(Continued from Page 1A)
 everything else. He said the people aren't sure what to do. He asked if the Congress will be working on a bill to help them.
 Sen. Roberts said he is on a committee which deals with health care. With the cost of food, medicine and energy on the increase, he predicts a bill will pass soon to deal with prescription drugs.
 Sen. Roberts said as soon as they get the tax relief package dealt with and then education, a prescription drug bill will come up.
 He said one of the president's main priorities is education, and he wants to

encourage schools to have students spend more time with science and math in the classroom
 Dennis Richards asked why officials want to make teachers accountable for students flunking tests, but we never hold the students responsible. Sen. Roberts said students will have to be held accountable. He said by ending the policy of "social promotion," they hope to stop people from graduating who shouldn't. His example was those in urban areas who graduated but can't read.
 Sen. Roberts said the president wants no student left behind, and he doesn't want them passed from grade to grade

without learning what they need to know.
 Another question was if there had been any more talk on opening trade with Cuba. Sen. Roberts said he hoped there would be trade with Cuba with the potential to trade rice, pork and grain.
 The host of the breakfast, LandMark owner Gary Anderson, asked with the declining population in rural areas like Decatur County, what are his thoughts on economic development.
 Sen. Roberts said part of rural development is farm aid, in which Decatur County received \$17.6 billion in last year, since that brings money to Main Street.

"It is a great place to live," he said, "but you have to be able to make a living."
 Although the rural areas are losing population, he added, the 1st District which he used to represent is actually gaining in numbers.
 "Somehow we have to learn how to not export our most precious commodity," said Sen. Roberts, "and that's our young people."
 Sen. Roberts answered a few more questions before heading to his next stop in Atwood, with the final destination for the day being Goodland, where he hoped to speak with Lt. Vignery's parents.

* Wheat fields need sunny weather

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 reproductive growth period, if you are looking for the extra boost with its size. "For guys who have puny wheat, they should spray now," said Mr. Gerlits.
 You can spray after the wheat joints,

he said, and the fertilizer will then go to help improve the protein of the plant instead of its actual growth. State reports say only 2 percent of the wheat has jointed as opposed to 44 percent at this time last year.
 Mr. Gerlits said if you spray the

wheat at the wrong stage, it will hurt it, but most people check before they make the decision.
 In about a week of so, he said, farmers will start to switch to corn and milo and will spray stubble fields so farmers can plant by the end of the month.

Although he said it is good for the fields to be a little wet to plant, they don't want it too muddy.
 Mr. Gerlits said the wheat fields need the sun to come out and the weather to stay warm so the plants have a chance to grow.

County	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Cheyenne	2640	4248	5587	6948	6221	5668	4708	4256	3678	3243	3165
Decatur	9234	8976	8121	8866	7434	6185	5778	4988	4509	4021	3472
Gove	2441	6044	4748	5643	4793	4447	4107	3940	3726	3231	3068
Greeley	493	1335	1028	1712	1638	2010	2087	1819	1845	1774	1534
Logan	1962	4240	3223	4145	3588	4206	4036	3814	3478	3081	3046
Rawlins	5241	6380	6799	7362	6618	5728	5279	4393	4105	3404	2966
Sherman	3341	4549	5592	7400	6421	7373	6682	7792	7759	6926	6760
Thomas	4112	5455	5517	7334	6425	7572	7358	7501	8451	8258	8180
Wallace	1178	2759	2424	2882	2216	2508	2069	2215	2045	1821	1749
Totals	30642	43986	43039	52292	45354	45697	42104	40718	39596	35759	33940

* Census shows declines in northwest Kansas

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 At this time the county now had 14 percent of the area's inhabitants and seemed destined to continue the climb. However, Mother Nature had different ideas and as the winds of the 30s began to blow, the population slipped to 6,421 in 1940. It did a bit of a see-saw over the next three decades, rising to 7,373 in 1950; falling to 6,682 in 1960; and rising to its highest level of 7,792 in 1970.
 Since that point, Sherman County has seen a slow decline down to 6,760 in the most recent figures. However, the county has been the second largest by population in the area since the 50s, and today has 20 percent of the total residents.
 In 70 years, Sherman County grew by 57 percent. In the last 30, the drop in population has been 13 percent total, but the most recent drop was only 2.4 percent. Sherman County remains 100 percent ahead of where it started the 20th century.
 One of the stabilizing forces has been I-70, and in recent years development of the area as a large player in sunflower production for both the oil and confectionery.
 Another has been the continued expansion and development of the Northwest Kansas Vocational and Technical School, which began more than 35 years ago and this month, with help from the Kansas Legislature, became a Technical College.
Greeley County
 While Decatur was beginning the slow decline, the other counties were getting a boost as an influx of new rail lines brought a boom to much of the area. Greeley County which had the

lowest population in the 1900 census at 493 people, had grown to 1,712 by 1930. Greeley had a small dip in 1940, but then showed growth through the '50s and '60s, reaching 2,087 in the 1960 census. Since then it has declined to where it is below the 1930 level, with 1,534 in the 2000 report.
 Greeley remains the smallest of the counties, but it's portion of the total population has grown from 2 percent in 1900 to 5 percent in 2000.
Rawlins County
 At the turn of the century, Rawlins County was second only to Decatur with a population of 5,241 and 17 percent of the total area residents. By 1930, Rawlins had grown to 7,362 and was the third largest county behind Decatur and Sherman. Thomas County was fourth by 28 people at 7,334.
 Decatur's share of the total population had dropped to 17 percent and Rawlins, Sherman and Thomas each had 14 percent of the total in 1930.
 That was the highest level for Rawlins, as the winds of the 30s started pushing people out and by 1960 the county was virtually at the same population it had shown in 1900.
 From the 5,279 of the 1960 census, Rawlins County has dropped another 44 percent to 2,966 in the most recent count.
 Efforts for economic development within the county had been looking up in recent years, but development of a plant to make pressboard out of wheat straw has not gotten any further than a ceremonial ground-breaking during Gov. Bill Graves re-election campaign in 1998.
Thomas County
 As the 20th century began, Thomas

County was the third largest in the area with a population of 4,112 in the 1900 census. Today, it has the largest population of the area at 8,180 and represents 24 percent of the area total.
 Thomas County's growth was a moderate 34 percent, reporting 5,517 in 1920, but that had jumped another 33 percent to 7,334 in 1930.
 Being on the eastern edge of the windy high plains, Thomas County had a modest drop of 12 percent in the 1940 report, but had surpassed even the 1930 level by 1950 at 7,572. Thomas County stayed in the 7,500 range through 1970, and hit a new high of 8,451 in 1980. This was a 12 percent increase from the previous high in 1950, and a 100 percent increase from the 1900 census.
 There has been a slight decline in the past two census reports, with Thomas County dropping 3 percent to 8,180 in the 2000 census.
Cheyenne County
 The northern-most county in the area, Cheyenne has been one of the most steady over the 100 years. The 1900 census put the county at 2,640 and the 2000 census put it at 3,165, a modest 20 percent increase in 100 years. That was down 60 percent from its peak, however.
 The highest point for Cheyenne was in 1930, when the census reported 6,948 and the county had 14 percent of the area's total residents.
 In the census of 1900, Cheyenne county had 9 percent of the area population and with the 2000 census report the county represents 9 percent of today's area residents.
Wallace County
 Another county of the area which has been pretty flat in population over the

century is Wallace, which reported 1,178 in 1900 and 1,749 in the 2000 figures.
 From 1910 until 1990, Wallace's population was over 2,000 with a high of 2,882 in 1930, but it dropped to 1,821 in the 1990 report.
 The county represented 4 percent of the total area population in 1900, rose to 6 percent in 1930, and is 5 percent today.
Logan County
 This small county on the southern edge of the area has increased 55 percent over the 100 years, starting at 1,962 in 1900 and reporting 3,046 in the 2000 census.
 The high population point for this county was in 1950 with 4,206 people.
 Logan represented 6 percent of the total area residents in 1900, and that has grown to 9 percent today and the county has moved ahead of Rawlins County as the sixth largest county by population.
Gove County
 Gove started the 20th century with 2,441 people and nearly tripled that in 10 years to 6,044, which was the high mark for the county.
 By the 1930 census, Gove had dropped to 5,643, but that represented 11 percent of the residents of the nine-county area.
 The county numbers remained in the 4,000 range until 1970, when the census reported 3,940. That has continued to drop in every census with 3,068 reported in the latest release.
 Gove is holding onto fifth place in the area, just ahead of Logan, but is virtually tied with both Logan and Rawlins with 9 percent of the total area population. In 1900, Gove represented 8 percent of the area total.

* Pilot said quick prayer as the plane was diving to sea

(Continued from Page 1A)
 pilots swapped seats, preparing to jump out of the plane.
 Lt. Vignery said he went to the back of the plane and was waiting for the signal to jump when he heard the landing gear descending.
 "I didn't even know we were going to land," he said, "until I heard the landing gear."
 Armed Chinese soldiers met the

crew at the plane's entrance, Lt. Vignery said, but they didn't threaten them or aim their guns.
 "There were a lot of Chinese military," he said, "and some did have guns, but they never pointed them at us."
 Lt. Vignery said he is barred from revealing details, but did say that Chinese officials interrogated crew members individually and talked about putting the U.S. officers on trial for the

accident, in which a Chinese pilot died.
 "I can't talk about it," he said, "but I can say it wasn't fun."
 The crew was fed well, Lt. Vignery said, eating mostly the traditional Chinese staples of rice, vegetables and fish. He said only one of the crew was brave enough to try the fish head that usually sat atop a mound of rice on each plate.
 To keep spirits up, he said, the crew would make up skits based on popular

television shows to perform for each other before dinner.
 Ron Vignery called his son and the rest of the crew "reluctant heroes," adding that they don't realize the effect they've had on millions of Americans.
 "I don't think I'm a hero," Jeff Vignery said. "I'm just like everyone else. I get up in the morning and go do a job."

* Ecstasy sold by youths

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 soon this will happen because there is a tremendous backlog with the Kansas Bureau of Investigation laboratory, which tests evidence in drug cases. He said it will easily take 90 days before officials get information back.
 Chief Wade Lockhart has said charges most likely would not be pressed against the buyers because of cooperation the department received from them and their parents. Mr. Hirsch said in drug cases, this is often how it works since the main thing is to find the supplier.

Restraining order keeps greenhouse in Norcatour

A couple purchased a greenhouse in Norcatour last week, but they weren't able to move it Saturday because a restraining order had been issued by the district court forbidding anything to be moved off the property.
 Decatur County Sheriff Ken Badsy said R.J. Allen and his wife are going through a divorce and as part of that, Mr. Allen got a restraining order. The sheriff said he was called to Norcatour Saturday afternoon because the couple was trying to move the greenhouse.
 Sheriff Badsy said he told the couple they could move the structure if they had the proper paperwork, meaning a court order from the judge releasing the property. They didn't and the structure was left there.
 Mr. Allen lives in Denver and Mrs.

Allen in Norton.
 About the same time Saturday, Nathan Minnik, 24, was pulled over because his tags had expired more than a year ago. Sheriff Badsy said Deputy Bert Cool knew there was a tax warrant out for him for \$17 worth of back taxes.
 Sheriff Badsy said if Mr. Minnik had renewed his tags, he could have paid the back taxes then, but if you don't

pay your back taxes, you aren't allowed to renew your tags.
 Mr. Minnik's vehicle was towed and he got a ticket for driving with expired tags.
 The sheriff said he will have to pay the tow bill and show his current registration and proof of insurance before getting his car back. And he'll have to pay the \$17 in back taxes.

Family injured in car accident

Ron and Missy Nelson, Blake and Alivia of McCook suffered injuries in an accident on Interstate 76 near Fort Morgan, Colo., on Friday. Mrs. Nelson is the daughter of Roger and Corky (Eckhardt) Krizek of McCook.

Blake, 11, had head injuries; Mr. Nelson, two broken vertebrae in his neck; Mrs. Nelson broke a bone in her lower back; and Alivia, 8, had only bruises.

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