



REP. JOHN FABER spoke to about 15 people while Sen. Decatur County Courthouse on Saturday during a tour of Ralph Ostmyer listened. The legislators stopped at the four counties covered by their districts.
— Herald staff photo by Kimberly Davis

Legislators stop for pizza, issues

By CYNTHIA HAYNES

Pizza and politicians awaited 15 Decatur County citizens at the courthouse on Saturday as State Sen. Ralph Ostmyer and Rep. John Faber dropped by to chat with constituents about this year's session.

The legislators were at the third-floor courtroom from 11:15 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. to talk about issues, but first everyone dug into a lunch of pizza and pop provided by the Decatur County Farm Bureau.

After chowing down and talking informally with those gathered in the hall, the men went into the courtroom to talk about what is happening in Topeka and answer questions.

Sen. Ostmyer, in the third year of his first four-year term in the upper house, talked about rural health, schools, prairie dogs, gambling and a plan to close 11 U.S. Farm Service Agency county offices.

The senator said a lot of people in the upper ranks of the Senate hail from western Kansas, and that bodes well for rural health issues.

Problems still remain, he said, but the Legislature is working on them.

One thing that's changed, he said, is that the school finance issue is settled, with money for schools safely tucked away. School administrators should know what they have to spend over the next couple of years, he said, and few have turned out for his county meetings, unlike the last few years.

"Schools will be taken care of," he said, adding that education money has been put in a "lock box."

Rep. Faber agreed, but warned that the big eastern counties are looking to take away low-

enrollment weighting, which is helping most schools in this area.

"I have five counties," he said. "Johnson County has 20 representatives and in 2010, there will be another reapportionment."

He said he wasn't as convinced as the senator about the safety of school money.

"Education money is in a lock box and everybody in the Legislature has a key," he said.

Sen. Ostmyer said that while he feels any farmer or rancher should be allowed to have prairie dogs and/or black footed ferrets on their land, they should not let them spread to their neighbor's land.

"We'll never get rid of them," he said of rodents, "and with the drought, they are moving east."

He said a proposed bill to change state law on eradicating prairie dogs may make the process too complicated, and he doubts it will pass.

The senator said he thought expanded gambling would come up again this year. There will always be people trying to use gambling as a means of paying the bills, he said, and while there are two sides to the argument, he isn't for it.

"Gambling will rear its ugly head again," he predicted.

He said that he isn't for closing the Farm Service Agency office in Gove, one of 11 in the state to be eliminated this year.

Once the agency sees that it's easy to close an office in one small county, he said, it will close more and more.

The office in Gove doesn't cost much to operate, he said, and farmers will have to drive farther to see an agent.

We may have fewer farmers out here, Mr. Ostmyer said, but we still have the same amount of farm and ranch land.

Oberlin Herald publisher Steve Haynes agreed.

"It's just the government pulling the rug out from under the small towns for no purpose except for the convenience of management," Mr. Haynes said.

Mr. Faber, who is in his 11th year in the House and is now chairman of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, talked about a conservation program which would buy water rights to the Arkansas River basin from farmers.

The Arkansas is over appropriated, he said, as is the Republican River basin in the northwest, but because the Republican is part of an interstate compact with Nebraska and Colorado, it would be better to work with them than try to buy up water rights around here.

Mr. Faber said that what western Kansas needs is to bring people into the communities and keep the schools full.

The area needs jobs, he said, but they need to be created out here because no one else will do it for us.

Sen. Ostmyer said that the new bus plant in Jennings should be great for the area.

He said that he would do what he could to help Oberlin expand its airport to help both business and for other needs, including air ambulances.

The legislators visited St. Francis and Atwood in the morning. After leaving Oberlin, they headed for their last stop in Norton.

Commission moves forward on hospital bids

The Decatur County commissioners approved the contract for an architect and the low bid for construction at the hospital, but held off on signing the construction contract so the county attorney could go over it.

At their meeting last Tuesday, the commissioners talked with members of the hospital board and Dave Barber from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development agency. He said the paperwork for a low-interest loan to finance the addition is at the state office waiting for approval on eligibility. The next step will be to obligate the money.

In the environmental assessments, he said, there was a little hitch, but it has been straightened out.

Mr. Barber said he thinks things will move quickly from here. The hospital will put in \$150,000, he said, and that money will be spent first, most likely on the architect.

The county has agreements on the table with the architect and a construction contractor, said Mr. Barber, but until the approval comes through, he can't guarantee any money.

The two bids for the expansion project came from Simone Contractors of North Platte for \$677,000 and from Rhoads Construction Co. in Goodland for \$658,000.

After the commissioners sign the contract, said Mr. Barber, his agency needs to sign off on it.

County Attorney Steve Hirsch

said he hadn't read the contract because it says it is between the architect and a client named as Decatur Health Systems. The client needs to be Decatur County, he said. Hospital Administrator Lynn Doeden called the architect and they sent a new front page.

Commissioner Stan McEvoy said the hospital board approved paying for the project until the federal money comes in.

The main thing, said Mrs. Doeden, is to get the architect and contractor contract signed up.

Mr. Hirsch said he couldn't look at the construction contract until Thursday. He said he already looked at the architect's contract. Mrs. Doeden said the bids expire March 1.

If the contracts don't get approved, said Mr. McEvoy, the costs could go up. Is there anything that says the county can't hire another lawyer to look at the contracts? No, said Mr. Hirsch.

Mrs. Doeden called Chuck Frickey, a lawyer and former hospital board member, but the group decided to have Mr. Hirsch read the contract.

Commissioner Ralph Unger said he would call the construction company since the county had just received the contract.

The company extended the bid date to Tuesday, when the commissioners will consider the contracts again. They agreed to take the low bid.

Superintendent interviews in S.D.

Oberlin's school superintendent, possibly interested in returning to his home state, interviewed last Thursday for superintendent of the Pierre, S.D., School District.

Kelly Glodt, hired in 2002 to replace Superintendent Duane Steele, told the *Capital Journal* in Pierre that moving to South Dakota would be like moving back home.

Mr. Glodt attended South Dakota State University in Brookings and he and his wife Sue are both from Gettysburg, about 52 miles from Pierre. Mr. Glodt has 19 years' experience as a teacher in Garden City for six years, a principal for four and superintendent in Oberlin.

In Oberlin, School Board President Dewayne Jackson said the board was aware that Mr. Glodt applied for the job. Mr. Glodt has been straightforward with the board, he said. He comes from South Dakota, and his father isn't in good health,

so he wants to move closer to him.

Mr. Glodt, said Mr. Jackson, was one of the five applicants for the South Dakota job position. Another applicant is Dr. Don Marchant, superintendent of the McCook School District in Nebraska.

Although the job hasn't been mentioned at a board meeting, Mr. Jackson said, Mr. Glodt told the board about it in his newsletter. The superintendent was quoted as telling the South Dakota board he hadn't applied for any other jobs and wasn't planning to move.

Mr. Glodt told the South Dakota newspaper that the size of the Pierre School District attracted him.

"Garden City's district was rapidly growing, with about 7,500 kids," said Mr. Glodt. "Pierre's size is the perfect size for a school district. Although Garden City was a wonderful district, when they get to be that much larger, the kids become numbers."

Moving to Oberlin, Mr. Glodt said, he found he could learn more.

"In a smaller district, as superintendent you have the opportunity to learn every facet of what a superintendent needs to know," said Mr. Glodt. "It gives you first-hand experience of all the different entities. It prepared me very well for what I say is the perfect-sized district."

The Pierre district has 2,586 students in seven schools.

The South Dakota school board is supposed to announce a decision at its meeting Monday.

Quilt shop to get front angle parking

The Oberlin City Council approved a resolution to add angle parking in front of Country Quilting on West Commercial Street at a meeting last Thursday, with the business paying \$5,200 and the city \$800.

City Attorney Steve Hirsch said the business would pay for most of the work, but the city would pay for the guttering. The city needs to pass a resolution to do the project, he said.

The parking would be on the north of the business, from the alley to a sidewalk that enters the business.

The council approved the resolution.

Larry Brennan, vice president with Bus and Coach International, said he wanted to let the council know how things are going. The company projected to sell 20 to 30 buses in its first year, he said, but in the first quarter they have booked orders for about 60 buses. Now, he said, they just have to fulfill the orders, which are manufactured in China to American standards.

He said the firm appreciates the community's support.

The county had a past and a present, said Councilman Jay Anderson, but the bus company has given it a future.

Missing man found in lake

The Plainville Rescue Squad recovered the body of an 81-year-old Rawlins County man who had been missing since November from Keith Sebelius Reservoir in Norton County last week.

In November state Wildlife and Parks employees found Dale Nelson's truck near the lake. At that time, the squad's dive team searched the water and the Kansas Highway Patrol searched by air, but nothing turned up.

Last Monday, a park ranger saw the body just after 3 p.m. and the squad came in and got Mr. Nelson out of the lake.

Norton County Sheriff Troy Thomson said Mr. Nelson's body was found along the north shore in the state park area.

The man's family identified the body. Sheriff Thomson said preliminary autopsy results show the cause of death was drowning. He said he would know more after the full autopsy. As of Monday, he said, the county hadn't received the full report.

NOTICE - LAST DAY to REGISTER For 2007 City/School General Election

Monday, the 19th of March, 2007, the Office of the County Clerk will remain open until 9 p.m. to give residents of Decatur County - who are not registered voters - a last chance to register to vote for the City School Election which will be held on the 3rd day of April, 2007.

Polls will open at 7 a.m. and close at 7 p.m. on that Tuesday, Election Day.

Done this 2nd Day of March, 2007
Marilyn Horn, Decatur County Election Officer

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