

# Voters question elected officials at town meeting

By LINDA SCHNEIDER and KAREN KRIEN

The Saint Francis Herald

Voters delivered a wake-up call for area legislators early Saturday, Feb. 13, in Bird City.

The Bird City American Legion Hall was packed, with people standing in the back as around 300 voters gathered.

Many apparently were responding to ads and posters put out by the Community Builders group. The group ran a full page ad in the *St. Francis Herald* and *Bird City Times* telling people to come to the meeting and what the group wanted to talk about.

At the same time, everyone said they realized that the state is over \$400 million in the hole and there is no money to spend. Schools and health-care administrators have been making cuts while trying to keep programs and services going, but the rumor is that the state will continue to make cuts.

Cheyenne County residents from both St. Francis and Bird City began arriving and filling up the hall long before Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer and Rep. John Faber appeared at 8 a.m.

Sen. Ostmeyer opened the meeting by saying he knew folks had a lot of questions to ask. The senator said he wanted to talk about a bill on the death penalty, but it was clear the crowd had other ideas.

Rep. Faber, a former member of the Brewster School Board, told the group that even though he was no longer on the School Finance committee, he was familiar with how school finances work, and knew the concerns communities are having over the state cuts. He said he didn't think there would be more cuts in education or health care, but that won't solve the state's financial dilemma.

"The news is not good, but the 'bleeding' has slowed down," he said.

He added that he knew that some people were in favor of a 1-percent sales tax increase but he thought budget cuts would make the real difference in making ends meet. He said an estimated 26,000 Kansans could lose their jobs with a sales tax increase.

Rep. Faber explained a free service provided by the state to school districts. He said the Legislative Division of Post-Audit could assist schools in locating areas where they could save money, adding that he was disappointed that no one within the district had asked for the service.

This comment received a lot of attention. It was echoed throughout the hall that there was no such thing as a "free service," and that taxpayers end up paying big bucks for those specialists coming to do the assessment.

St. Francis Superintendent Rob Schiltz added that figures Rep. Faber was handing out at the meeting were misleading. He said that the state calculated the money used for repairing school buildings, retirement accounts and money sent to the Educational Service Center in Oakley in a district's budget.

The state, he said, instead of directly paying the Educational Service Center for special education services, as it used to, now sends that money to the schools which, in turn, pay the center. The employees' retirement money is electronically deposited in the school's account and that same day, electronically withdrawn, he said.

"It isn't our money," Mr. Schiltz said. "It is making the school's budget look far better than it is and this money is being used to give incorrect information to the public."

"You send us funding, then turn right around and take it back."

Lea Keller of St. Francis said she was concerned about the decisions made in the state capital. Legislators want businesses to grow, she said, yet, schools, hospitals, and assisted living are the businesses here, and the state is cutting the money which sustains them.

Wheat and corn crops and cattle put Kansas on the map, and the legislators should make it their business to keep western Kansas thriving, she said. Instead, they want the communities to survive hanging onto a shoestring.

We have tried to be fiscally responsible but, she said, the state government didn't run out of money over night. If we need to raise taxes, then do it.

From this point, three questions were posed to the legislators by Tom Keller, St. Francis, spokesman for the Community Club:

- Kansas is facing a \$400 million shortfall. What is your plan as an elected official to address this situation?

- How do you expect local services, schools, hospitals, nursing home to survive?

- A 1-cent sales tax increase would generate substantial revenue from many, while funding the cuts with local taxes would put the shortfall on few, especially in western Kansas. Which of these are you more likely to support?

Rep. Faber answered that the Appropriations Committee will be taking next year's budget to the House to be voted on. This will decide whether there will be further cuts or an increase in taxes. The 2010 budget is already set and cannot be changed, he said.

"We are making it by the skin of our teeth this year," said Rep. Faber. "There will probably be a flat budget and few cuts, but not to education or medical."

Sen. Ostmeyer added that the state is in a dilemma, especially since accepting the federal bailout money, which will disappear within two years.

"Vote us out if we are not doing the job," said Rep. Faber.

Rick Reeser, former Good Samaritan Village administrator, said the government needed to reduce expenses and increase revenue. He suggested the state should reduce the number of employees it has. If communities have to cut back, the state government needs to cut back also, he said.

Mr. Reeser added that it is a tremendous strain in the medical industry to have a fire marshal inspect a nursing home and require replacement of a \$15,000 exhaust hood over the kitchen stove because a seam was not sealed, then say there are going to be budget cuts.

Where is the logic in having to pay for the fire marshal when the county fire chief can do the same thing? he asked.

Barbara Antholz, who works for the Cheylin School District, asked the legislators about the idea of combining classes of less than 25 students. The schools, she said, are already on a tight budget. Does this mean students are going to be bused to Hays?

"You both need to stand up for the little people," she said. "We are important, too."

After three years of funding cuts for developmental/handicap services, is the state going to reopen state institutions? asked Bonnie Burr, a member of the Northwest Kansas Developmental Services board. She said it would be more expensive to open state institutions to accommodate these needs.

"Goodland is asking for a \$1 million grant to replace the bricks on Main Street," she said. "I hope you don't vote for this and instead send the money to Developmental Services."

Cheylin Superintendent Bruce Bolen told the crowd that he has a prudent school board, great staff and teachers, but the supplemental fund cannot pay. The problem begins when the district makes its budget based on the funding the state says it will provide, then starts cutting, he said. It hurts because there can be no planning.

Last year, the state cut \$20,000 in July, after the budget was made and approved. Then another \$75,000 was cut in November.

Mr. Schiltz said the St. Francis schools lost \$240,980 in state money last year. There have been 7.3 teaching positions, one administrator and six assistant coaching jobs in the last few years, along with the other smaller cuts. The board, he said, does not want to cut programs or staff.

Terry Miller, Cheyenne County clerk, said he had been asked by other clerks to ask Rep. Faber why he had voted to take away all or part of the taxes collected on cell and land-line phones. These taxes, Mr. Miller said, have helped the county establish the 911 dispatch center and furnish radios, pagers and other necessary equipment.

Mr. Faber said that wasn't what the bill had stated. Mr. Miller countered, saying if that was the case, then there were a lot of clerks and other people across the state who had misinterpreted the bill.

Mr. Faber said it was possible that he had not completely understood the bill.

"We have a voice, and we are not here to kill the messenger," said Dr. Mary Beth Miller. "Everyone here has a stake in this county and you should represent us."

## Getting ready



ACREW DID SURVEY WORK last week around Oberlin in preparation for building a city water treatment plant and

upgrades to the distribution system.

— Herald staff photo by Kimberly Davis

# Health fair set for Gateway on April 8

The Decatur County Health Department will be rounding up booths for the county health fair at the beginning of April.

The fair, said Health Administrator Marilyn Gamblin, is set for Thursday, April 8. In past years, she said, the fair has been held at The Gateway, but this year it's scheduled for 2 to 7 p.m. at the Golden Age Center.

The department use to hold the

fair every year, but now holds it every two years. To get ready for the event, they will draw blood Wednesday and Thursday, March 24 and 25.

She said they offer two kinds of blood tests. A complete blood profile, which looks at everything from glucose to lipids to blood count to the thyroid, costs \$25. A prostate specific antigen test for men, designed to detect prostate

cancer, is \$20.

Anyone wanting a blood test needs to make an appointment by calling the department at 475-8118. Blood will be drawn between 7:30 and 10:30 a.m.

Anyone signing up for a blood test needs to fast, eating and drinking nothing but water, between midnight and their appointment.

Ms. Gamblin said the fair will be aimed more at middle-aged to

older people. There will be more preventative items for them and not so much for kids.

She said she's sent invitations out, but anyone interested in having a booth can contact her.

The clinic will set up a booth, she said, so that the blood test information can be handed out and any questions answered.

# Hoedown planned for nursing center

By MARY LOU OLSON  
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Mark your calendar, grab your partner, and get on your dancing shoes and western attire for a Hoedown at the Oberlin American Legion on Saturday, March 20, sponsored by the staff of the Decatur County Good Samaritan Center.

Doors will open at 6 p.m. for a full evening, which will include a prime rib dinner at 7 p.m., a silent auction of items donated by area merchants and individuals, and a dance starting at 8 p.m. Bidding will continue during the festivities, with winners revealed later in the evening.

Tickets are \$25 each, or a group or business may sponsor a table. Seats for dinner are limited. For the dance only, tickets will be \$5 at the door. Dinner and dance tickets, \$25, should be purchased by Monday, March 15.

"Money raised from this event will go to a variety of projects," said Cindi Sloan-Sauder, resource development director. "We are a nonprofit organization, and rely on tax-deductible donations to fund the projects that benefit the residents."

"Although the center receives funds from the county for building maintenance, anything extra to maintain a healthy and positive atmosphere for the residents comes from memorials and donations."

Administrator Janice Shobe added, "This will be a good opportunity for the community to enjoy good food and dancing, and raise money to help our elders live the best life they can."

Dress will be casual western. For tickets or to donate an item for the auction, call Ms. Sloan-Sauder or Montine Alstrom at (785) 475-2245.

# District sets meeting

A special meeting to talk about the financial future of the Oberlin School District scheduled for last Wednesday was postponed until Monday, March 8.

With two meetings that night and not all of the information compiled, the board decided to hold off on the special meeting.

Superintendent Duane Dorshorst said the board will hold the meeting at 7 p.m. Monday, before the regularly scheduled board meeting, which should begin about 7:30 p.m.

The meeting is open to the public and will be held at the district office.

# County will train two to teach med helpers

The Decatur County commissioners agreed to pay for two emergency medical workers to take classes to become trainers. Ambulance Director Linda Manning said the training officer the services had used wants quit so there haven't been any classes since last fall.

She said Dave Depperschmidt and Chris Koerperich, both emergency medical technicians, are interested in taking the classes to become trainers. It would cost \$800 for each person, said Ms. Manning.

In the past, said Commissioner

Ralph Unger, when the county has agreed to pay for education, commissioners have asked that person to agree to serve for a year or pay the county back.

The county got burned once on this in the past, said Mr. Unger. The county paid for someone to get trained, he said, and then they moved a month later.

Mr. Unger suggested County Attorney Steve Hirsch write up an agreement to protect everyone involved. It's nothing personal, said Mr. Unger, just good business.

# Notice of Personal Property Assessment

Personal property renditions must be filed between January 1 and March 15. Renditions filed after March 15 will have a penalty for late filing. Taxable personal property includes: Business and shop equipment, computers and printer, boats, motor and trailers, aircraft, mobile homes, camping and travel trailers, flatbed and car trailers, mopeds, ATV's, golf cars, trucks, non-tagged and non-highway vehicles and improvements on leased land.

The Decatur County Appraiser's Office need to be notified of the sale of any personal property during 2009. All taxpayers must file before the March 15 deadline.

All new businesses in Decatur County are required to contact the Decatur County Appraiser's Office to report business equipment for tax purposes.

If you have no personal property to report please call us to verify that you are in the county for census purposes.

Personal Property Penalties:

March 15 through April 15 .....	5%
April 16 through May 15 .....	10%
May 16 through June 15 .....	15%
June 16 through July 15 .....	20%
On or after July 16 through May 14 of the following year .....	25%
Failure to File .....	50%

**Decatur County Appraiser's office**

**785-475-8109**



## BEAT THE BAD BUG!

**GET VACCINATED**

The H1N1 flu vaccine is widely available and recommended for everyone, including:

- Pregnant women
- Healthcare workers
- All children and young adults ages 6 months through 24 years of age
- Caregivers for children under 6 months of age
- People ages 25-64 years of age with certain high-risk medical conditions
- Anyone wanting to protect themselves against H1N1 influenza

For more information, call the Kansas H1N1 Hotline at 1-877-427-7317, visit [www.kdheks.gov](http://www.kdheks.gov), or contact your healthcare provider.

STAY INFORMED AND STAY AWARE!