

State's lack of money a hot topic

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**
k.davis@nwkansas.com

State elected officials talked with a handful of people Saturday at the Decatur County Courthouse mainly about money or the state's lack of it.

Senator Ralph Ostmeyer and Representative John Faber talked with 10 people Saturday morning. The men were here last month, but said they would return after finding out there was an event in town the same day.

Mr. Faber said while lots has been talked about on the budget in the appropriations committee nothing is going to be done on it until after the beginning of May.

"It's like we are going to go shopping with a credit card," he said, "and find out what we want to buy and then figure out how we

are going to pay for it."

Mr. Faber said he doesn't like it.

There has been talk about sales tax increases, getting rid of exemptions and other ideas about the budget.

By the time all is said and done, said Mr. Faber, there will probably be some kind of sales tax increase.

Mr. Faber talked about some other bills including one that passed where new businesses in Kansas won't pay any withholding taxes for three years. The state isn't paying businesses to come here. The businesses will still pay sales tax and property tax, he said. There was other criteria in the bill too. Mr. Faber said he thought the bill got 100 out of 125 votes in the house.

The senate is trying to work on another 10 year transportation plan, said Mr. Ostmeyer.

He said he didn't think it was a good idea with the deficit the state already has.

"When you stop and think about it," said Mr. Ostmeyer, "it isn't that we didn't balance the budget, it's that we didn't do the work right."

The whole country is in the same boat, he added.

The state started to spend future money back in 2005, said Mr. Ostmeyer, and it's continuing from there.

A penny sales tax increase isn't going to go that far, he said. At this rate there could still be some allotments in 2010.

Next thing you know there will be a tax increase on sugar, pop and hamburgers. Anything that can be tied to something, said Mr. Ostmeyer.

"Right now," he said, "I think we all need

to live inside our means."

Over the last couple years the schools have been able to build up some cash reserves, he said. Cuts as much as 6 percent have been discussed, which would mean \$180,000 to \$190,000 for Oberlin. That would burn through the money that was built up.

These are trying times, said Mr. Ostmeyer. The budget won't be worked on until May 3 so that the officials can figure out where the state is at. If the state is still behind, he said, there will be more allotments.

The governor has the power to make those allotments, said Mr. Ostmeyer. He doesn't need permission.

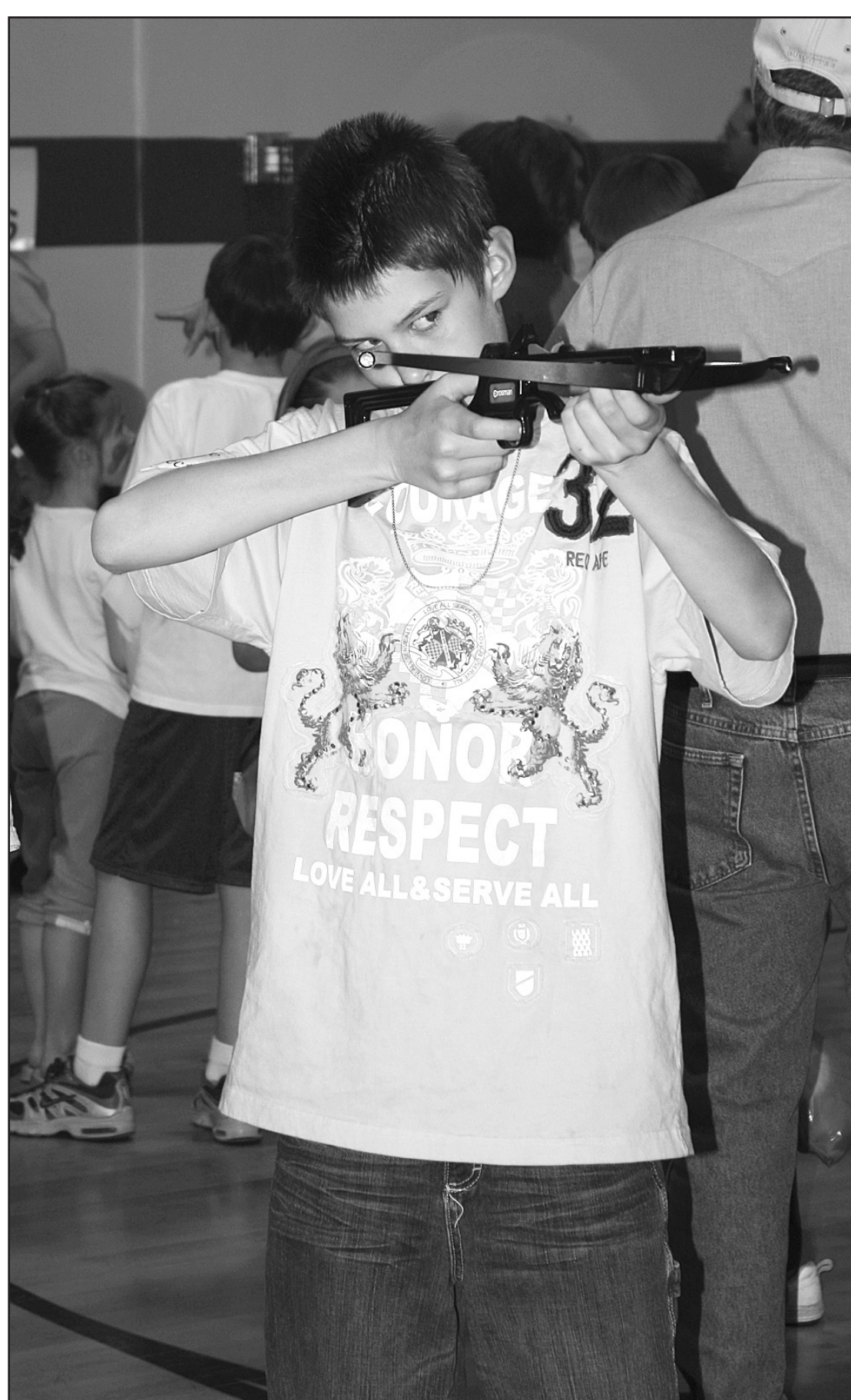
"It scares me the direction we are heading as a nation," he said, "and then you throw states into it."

Mr. Ostmeyer touched on the health care plan, which he said also scares him. Even with the newest plan it still leaves 10 million people who can't afford insurance. Either way they are going to pay or be penalized.

When all is said and done though, he said, Kansas is a great state to live in and we will get through this.

The men opened the floor to questions. Treasurer Jean Hale asked about a senate bill in which the department of motor vehicles would lose \$4.8 million to the state's general fund. Mr. Faber said it was so late now in the session that if that bill doesn't come up on Monday or Tuesday it won't. The biggest threat now is the budget bill because other items will get thrown in and make it a mega bill.

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Bowling alley needs donations for completion

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**
k.davis@nwkansas.com

While the front section of the new bowling alley on Main Street is just about finished the back part, where the lanes will be located, is still under construction.

Greg Lohofener, with the Oberlin-Decatur County Area Economic Development Corp., said the front section has been painted, the carpet is here and should be installed this week.

The front section, said Mr. Lohofener, is for the added recreation to the center.

That's where the foos ball table, ping pong, pool table and possible other arcade games will be located. He said he hopes to have the front section open before school is out so that kids will have another place to go this summer.

When it's finished, said Mr. Lohofener, the doors from the adjoining cinema can be opened and then kids can also use the air hockey table in the front of that section, the arcade games and video games. Then the snack bar can also be open.

The two restrooms are also located on the cinema side of the building.

He added that the corporation is within \$5,000 of having the needed money to finish the first part of the building.

Another set of doors will separate the bowling alley from the front recreation section. That part still needs a lot of work and is right now an open space.

He said they are waiting on a firm construction cost to finish the bowling alley. The corporation recently received an updated bid to move the lanes and electronic scoring and restore the items.

Until the construction bid is in, he won't know how much money will need to be raised to finish the project.

The corporation is planning to start another fundraiser drive after tax season. However, people can still donate money at any time by calling him at 475-3459 or Connie Grafel, marketing director, at 475-2901.

Lots of people enjoyed a good corn harvest this year, he said. If they want to they can donate grain towards the project at any of the local elevators and they are looking at other money sources other than just donations.

Work continues at Sappa Park

Work continues to go on at Sappa Park including on the trails, for the future bathrooms, to the wetlands and the surrounding area.

One of the future projects includes putting up a braided cable around the grassy area near the shelter house to keep people off the grass. The braided cable will go across the front of the grassy area where the playground equipment is then down by where the fireplace is located under the shelter house.

In the past year people have driven their vehicles on the lawn, said Kimberly Davis, co-convenor of the Sappa Park Committee, and torn up the grass. The braided cable will have a lock, so that people can check out a key to obtain access to that area for events.

Due to the criminal damage at Sappa Park, said Police Chief Wade Lockhart, video surveillance has been initiated.

Connie Riedel, committee co-convenor, said the Sappa Park committee talked at the meet-

ing last Thursday about setting up camping spots in the island between the shelter house and the dam. Wire will need to be run to allow for electricity for pull-in camping in that spot.

The committee is working on making or buying some kind of box for deposits for those who choose to camp at Sappa Park. The committee, said Mrs. Riedel, also plans to work on setting up policies and fees for camping as well as using the shelter house and other areas.

With the changes happening at the lake in Red Willow County in Nebraska, she said, the committee is hoping to draw more campers and users to Sappa Park. The committee has been told that there is less water in that lake.

Mrs. Riedel said she's excited that Nan Stanley, the city's cemetery sexton, is going to be a participant in the development of Sappa Park. Mrs. Riedel added that she's happy that Ms. Stanley is looking forward to helping set up the camping area.

Fish fry and egg hunt planned for weekend

With Easter this weekend, here are a couple of activities to put on your calendar:

At 1 p.m. Saturday, the Oberlin Lions Club will hold its annual Easter Egg hunt for kids at City Park. There will be a roped-off area in front of the shelter and kids will be divided into age groups for 1 to 2 year olds, 3 to 4, 5 to 6 and 7 to 9.

The Easter Bunny is scheduled to make an appearance.

The Oberlin Business Alliance

will hold a fish fry and burger feed from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Friday in the drive-through south of the Business Enhancement Entrepreneurial Center for Good Friday.

Money raised during the lunch will go to help the alliance do something for the city's upcoming 125th Anniversary.





REPRESENTATIVE John Faber talked with a group of 10 in the courthouse on Saturday about recent bills and money.

He was joined by Senator Ralph Ostmeier. — Herald staff photo by Kimberly Davis

Kansas roads rank on best list

Reader's Digest's April issue features a survey of the best, worst and deadliest road in America, and Kansas ranks on top of the best roads list.

"We may not hear as much from Reader's Digest now as we did in its heyday, but the company is still kicking," writes reporter Richard Read for *The Car Connection*. "In compiling these lists, Reader's Digest has taken into consideration factors like the condition of highways and bridges, traffic congestion, and the number of speeding tickets issued in a given area."

The Best Roads list considers states as a whole with Kansas leading the list. The top 10 states include: 1. Kansas; 2. Wisconsin; 3. Montana; 4. New Mexico; 5. Utah; 6. North Dakota; 7. Wyoming; 8. Nebraska; 9. Virginia; and 10. Oregon.

Peggy Northrop, Reader's Digest vice president/Global Editor-in-Chief, says, "For decades, Reader's Digest has been a vocal proponent of safer roads in America. We hope our readers will use this report as a guide to becoming more aware of the road conditions in their own states and correct the unsafe driving behavior that transpires in the everyday lives of our nation's drivers."

The "Best Roads" list was determined by the latest data from the Federal Highway Administration, while the "Deadliest Roads" were calculated using a simple ranking of fatalities per 100 million miles driven. The story offers simple solutions that legislators and local highway officials can implement to fix the problem.

The country's safest and most sensible roads include: I-35 through Kansas; the Montana interstates; I-75 in northern Florida; I-80 in Utah; and I-95 between Elkton, and Baltimore, Md.

The article says I-35 through Kansas (and Kansas roads in general) "is well maintained and open, and offers an extremely smooth ride. There are rest areas that are easy in, and easy out. It has wide-open spaces and you don't feel the constant pressure of interacting

with traffic. Actually in Kansas all the highways are very good. Even the two-lane roads are great: smooth with shoulders."

The "Worst Road" cites specific stretches of highway for being egregiously bad: Louisiana's I-12 between Baton Rouge and Slidell, Pennsylvania's I-78 and I-80, New Jersey/New York's I-95 over the George Washington Bridge and Oklahoma's I-44, know as the Will Rogers Turnpike.

The "Deadliest Roads" category consists of two sub-categories. One is Driving Under the Influence, the other considers the number of fatalities due to speeding. Both take into account the number fatalities per miles driven (a figure that, on the whole, has dropped to its lowest point in U.S. history). The two lists contain several repeat offenders.

The top 10 states with the "Deadliest Roads" include: 1. Montana; 2. Louisiana; 3. South Carolina; 4. West Virginia; 5. Arkansas; 6. Mississippi; 7. Kentucky; 8. Wyoming; 9. Alabama; and 10. Nevada. Kansas ranked 26th on the deadliest road list. Neighboring state Colorado ranked 30th and Nebraska ranked 32nd.

The article said, "Although Montana appears at No. 3 on the Best Roads list (good infrastructure, little congestion), it tops the Deadliest list in part because of drivers who drink, drive recklessly, or shun seat belts."

The top 10 "Deadliest Roads" for DUI include: 1. Montana; 2. South Carolina; 3. Louisiana; 4. Wyoming; 5. West Virginia; 6. Mississippi; 7. North Dakota; 8. Texas; 9. Alabama; and 10. Arkansas. The highest ranked states for speeding include: 1. Alabama; 2. Mississippi; 3. South Carolina; 4. Wyoming; 5. Alaska; 6. Montana; 7. Pennsylvania; 8. Missouri; 9. Arizona; and 10. Texas.

Complete statistics, as well as the methodology used in the report and other information, are available at <http://www.readersdigest.com/bestandworstroads>.

*State officials discuss money shortage

(Continued from Page 1A) Chuck Frickey, lawyer, said he feels there needs to be some kind of tax increase. He said he's concerned about the cuts to primary, secondary and higher education. He added that he didn't know if a sales tax increase or a shift in the income tax brackets would make that big of a change. Any of these could be something temporary, said Mr. Frickey.

If a tax is put on, said Mr. Faber, it's never going to come off. He said he's not saying that he would vote against a tax increase, but if that's done this year, what tax is going to be raised next year when there is a deficit.

Maybe there are exemptions that need to be lifted, said Mr. Frickey. The last exemption made, said Mr. Faber, was the property tax for

equipment and machinery. He said he's not advocating for that.

What really needs to happen is more jobs. There are 160,000 people in the state out of work. Some of these people, said Mr. Faber, have been receiving unemployment for a year and they are being renewed.

This economy has to get turned around, he said, and raising taxes is the wrong way to do it. That doesn't mean, said Mr. Faber, that he won't vote for an increase.

There was some discussion about whether an increase in sales tax wouldn't be the fair way to do it. While it's fair because everyone pays it, said Mr. Faber, it doesn't help keep people local to shop. It's an open invitation to go across the border to buy groceries and other items.

If all the exemptions, said Mr. Faber, were taken off it could mean lowering sales tax 4 percent. If the agriculture equipment one was done away with it would solve the problems.

Mr. Frickey said he thought the cuts have gone deep enough that they are being felt.

It gets to a point where there has to be an increase.

Mr. Ostmeier said he thought he was right with the only way out of this is a sales tax or some kind of increase.

Tami Sporn, with the Farm Bureau, asked if the religious entities are going to be taxed. Mr. Ostmeier said that would only be \$23 million, which isn't enough.

There was a bill on the house floor, said Mr. Faber, but it was pulled out.

Stephanie Blau, with the county clerk's office, asked what's being done about the welfare system

because there are people who need it, but others who are abusing it. Kansas has a welfare system that attracts people, said Mr. Faber. He said he would like to institute a drug test for the welfare system.

There's a thin line between those who need the help and those who are abusing the system, said Mr. Faber.

The men talked about a bed tax on nursing homes and the 911 phone tax.

Patience, said Mr. Faber, is kind of the word for today.



R. Ostmeier

Man decides not to mentor here

The Decatur County commissioners talked with a former ambulance director about why he isn't going to be a mentor for two men wanting to take classes to become instructors.

Patrick Pomeroy, who now works at the Norton County ambulance, said at the meeting March 9 that he had received a call from an emergency medical technician from Decatur County to be a mentor for his instructor training.

Mr. Pomeroy said he declined because he didn't think he had the time to do the mentorship adequately. Mr. Pomeroy said he had mentored Aden Shillig for the class in the past.

Clerk Colleen Geihlsler had sent an e-mail out about the situation after reading a text message supposedly sent from Mr. Pomeroy which said the reason he wouldn't mentor the men was that the Norton County commissioners wouldn't let him. Ms. Geihlsler said she sent out the e-mail because she didn't

understand or like the fact that a county wouldn't want to help another county, especially a neighbor in western Kansas.

Mr. Pomeroy said he hadn't sent that text.

He said he made his decision because it would require more of a time commitment than he has right now. While the regulations only require three visits between the mentor and student, in reality it takes much more, he said.

Mr. Shillig handed out stacks of papers that he had to do for his training. At the time, he said, he was working at the prison, but was on leave because of an injury. Mr. Pomeroy was at Coffeyville Community College, but didn't have any classes.

Mr. Shillig said the process took a year and a half. It isn't something that can be done in three visits. Mr. Pomeroy said he was asked to mentor two students.

"This," he said, holding up the paperwork, "is just for one."

There is an instructor in this region, said Mr. Pomeroy, who is mentoring a new instructor and he has been to her class 17 times. If someone chooses to be a mentor, he said, it's from the very beginning to the bitter end.

Some of the regulations are going to change with the training and mentoring, he added.

Mr. Pomeroy said he doesn't want to set the Decatur County men up to fail, but he can't be their mentor at this time.

He said he wanted the commissioners to know that it wasn't that he didn't want to help out.

Commissioner Stan McEvoy said it wasn't a problem, but he had been asked to follow up on the situation, so he did. He added that he thought there was already another mentor set up to help the men.

The concern, said Mr. McEvoy, was if another county didn't want to help out.

"We are all in this together," he said.



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