

Board concerned about losing dollars

By Karen Krien
karen.k@nwkanssas.com

At the March 24 meeting, the Cheyenne County Hospital Board again discussed the fact that the facility was projected to lose an additional \$500,000 per year since the Good Samaritan Village fire on Oct. 19. Because the nursing home will be back in limited operation soon, the ongoing loss will be lower, but still significant.

Les Lacy, hospital administrator, said the hospital is a Critical Access Hospital, which is a program designed to improve rural health care access and reduce hospital closures. Critical Access Hospitals provide essential services to a community and are reimbursed by Medicare on a “reasonable cost basis” for services provided to Medicare patients.

The hospital operates its’ clinics as Rural Health Clinics, which are similarly reimbursed by Medicare on a “reasonable cost basis” for services provided to Medicare patients. However, as the balance tips toward younger patients and more un- and under- insured, this reimbursement mechanism may not fully meet the needs of the community. Mr. Lacy has been studying the Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) model for over 2 years and has se-

cured grant funding to do a financial analysis of the model.

Had the Cheyenne County Clinics been operated as a Federally Qualified Health Center, the clinic would have reduced losses by \$200,000. A federal grant of \$650,000 would then create a turn around for the clinic of \$850,000. Mr. Lacy cautioned the board that this is only part of the picture because we still need to look at how this impacts the hospital. In addition Lacy indicates that there are governance issues that may make this type of conversion difficult. He points out that State Line Health Network was an Federally Qualified Health Center but was not able to survive here. He also points out that he has been unable to find a frontier county or a county below 6,000 population that has both an Federally Qualified Health Center and a Critical Access Hospital.

While these Federally Qualified Health Centers receive better reimbursement from Medicare and Medicaid, in addition to other benefits, Lacy still had concerns about the program and will have more information at a later meeting. Mr. Lacy also mentioned a potential for a demonstration project to improve our services and reimbursement.

Dr. Mary Beth Miller, Dr. Re-

becca Allard, Krystal Raile, physician assistant, and Kent Allard were present at the meeting as Mr. Lacy talked about how the hospital and clinic were going to make it through the next year with fewer patients. The Village fire found the 47 residents placed in facilities in neighboring towns, and are being treated by the doctors in those towns.

Mr. Lacy pointed out that the staff wages had been frozen as of the first of the year. He also reported that the hospital had been able to meet its’ cash needs since the last board meeting, adding at least two months onto our time line, he said.

He said that he did not want to drop services at the hospital. We need to figure out a way to work this out. The upcoming Kansas Rural Health Works Community Engagement Process that will occur in the next few months will help the community to make decisions about what they need and want to pay for. Jackie John, area director for Great Plains Health Alliance, the company which leases the hospital, said it was important to put together the services the people in the communities want and need.

The Village, Mr. Lacy said, is to have 31 residents by May. While this will help, it is still short of the 47 beds before the fire. The county will be asked to support the nursing home. The hospital board will be asking for the full 12 mills approved by the residents in 1996.

Adding assisted living at the Village would be a good advantage both to the nursing home, the hospital and the people.

The discussion turned to informing the board about the future of the medical staff. There are two candidates who are interested in coming

to Cheyenne County. Dr. Allard and Dr. Miller said both candidates are at the top of their class and could have their pick of communities to practice in. However, they want to come to Cheyenne County. One has 3.5 years left of practice and the other, 4.5 years. In the next 20 years, there will be a shortage of primary care providers.

It was noted those hospitals that are having trouble are the ones without a stable medical staff.

The doctors said they thought providing obstetric care and delivery was necessary in attracting a young, growing medical community. Dr. Miller had called the Quinter hospital which is thriving. She was told that the personality of the providers is important in building practices.

If we cut even one service, said Erika Zimbelman, board member, it links with other services and we will end up loosing patients.

Kari Gilliland, board member, reminded those present that the hospital has made it through other financial crisis before. We need to keep on a positive course. People need to understand the challenge and how it will be paid for. The county understood the 12 mills are necessary.

People need to be willing to pay more taxes, said Jane Young, board member.

Equipment purchase

The board approved the lease purchase of a new CT scan. The cost of the equipment is \$326,000 and most of it will be paid for with the \$300,000 in Kansas State Tax Credits. The CT will be installed the week of March 21.

Mr. Lacy said the equipment will fit in the present CT scan department and it will not be necessary to put in additional floor supports.

Legislative News

By
**Ward
Cassidy**



Representative for the 120 District

Last week was “turn around” and we had Monday and Tuesday off. The time off was needed for the revisors to get the bills ready for each chamber. The bills passed out by the Senate will start being worked by the House and vice versa. We also go back to our committees to hear bills that are from exempt committees. The three exempt committees are Taxation, Federal and State, and Appropriations. Bills introduced into these committees are exempt from session deadlines and are referred to as “blessed.”

I was asked about several terms we use in the House and will explain them.

Final Action – A day after a bill passes the Committee of the Whole (COW) which allows amendments by the full House, the House Rules require the bill to lay over for a day before the Final Action vote that will pass the legislation to the Senate. Final action votes are normally taken at the beginning of the daily session. During Final Action, members must be in their seats and staff and visitors are not allowed on the floor.

I have been asked as to how we keep track of all the bills we vote on. I feel it is the most difficult process I have had to learn. The Republican caucus hears each bill early in the morning, prior to going to the chamber. This process is called “Calendar.” The representative presenting the bill in the House discusses the bill and answers any questions we might have. At that time we make notes as to how we are going to vote when it hits the floor. In Chamber the entire House hears the bill presented and responds to any amendments that might be suggested. We then vote to pass it to Final Action. The next day the bill is on Final Action, and we vote again. If the bill passes, it goes on to the Senate.

For me, the most difficult part of the process occurs when I have people from Northwest Kansas calling or sending e-mails and their input is split. It reminds me of my years of being a high school principal and that when you make a decision you make half of the people happy and the other half mad. Last week we voted over 100 times. That is a lot of information to disseminate to make a good decision and best represent Northwest Kansas.

We get information on bills from many different sources. The lobbyist groups are often referred to as the “third party” in Topeka. Most of these people are really good at their jobs and pres-

ent very good information about how a bill will affect their group. An example would be the Farm Bureau lobbyists are putting on a seminar this week on immigration policies.

The most active “lobbied” issue this session has been SB 54 to allow beer, wine, and liquor to be sold in grocery and convenience stores in the state. The bill has advanced from the Senate to Federal and State Affairs Committee but hasn’t yet been considered by the full Senate. One of the questions on my website asks for input on this issue should it reach the House.

The next two and one half weeks are going to deal with some major issues. There will be an attempt to repeal the statewide smoking ban HB 2340. I have already stated I am very opposed to that repeal.

We are also going to deal with repeal of the 1-cent sales tax increase HB 2091. I wish we could take several cents off of our sales tax, but the Governor feels we need it as this time, and I will go along with his wishes. There will be several bills presented dealing with illegal immigration, e-verify, and the financial concerns to our state. I am anxious to get good information on these issues.

Last week I mentioned good news about the financial advantages our state will receive from the Boeing contract. This week the bad news, the February revenues were down \$11.5 m below the estimate. Let’s pray for increasing revenues so we don’t have to consider any more cuts. We still have to quit spending more than we are taking in and I feel the Governor and the House are working toward that goal.

The biggest problem we face is the continued trend of population decline. If Northwest Kansas is going to continue to have services for our citizens, we are going to have to be proactive and start thinking outside the box. We have to realize things are not going to be the way they use to be. Communities and counties should start working and meeting together now and work towards possible solutions.

I have been working on a website since arriving in Topeka. My website has county links, census links, a questionnaire on important issues, all of my newsletters, my committees, and much more to come. You can view it at www.wardcassidy.com.

TOWN HALL

Continued from Page 1

the answer, he said, I have the resources that I can find the answer.

“My premise,” he said, “is that we can’t spend any more money than is being brought in.”

With all the budget cuts already proposed and those going on and the loss of the stimulus money, he said, government is still going to grow 6 percent this year and that’s bad news. The budget needs to be brought back down so there can be some positive growth.

He was concerned about the fact that the state received money from the federal government. If the state can’t meet the maintenance of effort which is \$26 million, the state can lose that money. Once they have lost the money, they can’t get it back. The state of Kansas doesn’t have \$26 million, he said.

Mr. Cassidy is expecting more cuts in education this year. A counselor and former teacher/principal, he finds the cuts discouraging but, even more discouraging, he expects the cuts to continue for three more years.

However, there is some good news. Kansas has been awarded the Boeing contract and there are positive indications concerning the Holcomb Power Plant. EPA, he said, needs to back off! He would like to see Environmental Protection Agency defunded.

Having these businesses mean billions of dollars will be coming

into the state.

Mr. Cassidy talked about fire marshals. As a principal, he found that their demands on the St. Francis schools and those across the state is unreasonable. The state is cutting schools \$300,000 but the expense for fire marshal issues such as new doors in the buildings is \$400,000.

Mr. Cassidy, after studying the matter, talked to Governor Brownback, expressing his anger and frustration. He was advised to write a bill so he did. Since then, the nursing home administrators have contacted him, also wanting his support for them.

He believes that he can make a positive impact in Topeka. He has made the front page of the Topeka newspaper and plans to make Northwest Kansas known on the hill.

Mr. Cassidy said his website is scheduled to be up and running at www.wardcassidy.com. He’s also been writing columns for the local newspapers.

Several people asked questions. Immigration issues seemed to bring out a lot of discussion. Mr. Cassidy believes in E-Verify but it hasn’t passed because it will cost millions of dollars if it is attacked. On the other side of the coin, he said, illegal immigration is costing local hospitals millions.

He encourages everyone to go to his new website, www.wardcassidy.com. Anyone having questions should e-mail him at Ward.Cassidy@house.ks.gov.

THERAPIST

Continued from Page 1

schedule an appointment, call her at 785-772-5041.

Mrs. Rice was born and raised in Eastern Colorado. She married her high school sweetheart, Ken Rice in 2004. Together they have seven adult children (one deceased), and eight grandchildren. Mr. Rice works at Petroleum Development Corp (PDC), Wray, as a pumper on natural gas wells. They are a licensed foster home.

She received her nursing degree at the University of Southern Colorado and worked as a registered nurse for 16 years. She is also a certified paralegal.

In 1996, she moved to Ogden, Utah, where she attended Weber State University and obtained a bachelor’s degree in social work in 2002. In 2003, she received a master’s degree in social work at Colorado State University’s accel-

erated program.

The next year, she worked for University of Utah Neuropsychiatric Institute doing drug, alcohol, and psychiatric triage in their clinical assessment center and for the University of Utah on their crisis/trauma team and on the burn unit. From 2004 to 2008, she worked at Axis-One, a private mental health agency, doing individual, family, parenting and substance abuse

In 2009, she was with the Centennial Mental Health in Wray, working with individual and group mental health as well as group substance abuse. In 2010, she worked with the Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center and a behavioral consultant for St. Francis, Bird City, Goodland Head Start, Sharon Springs, and Weskan schools.

She took the past year off after adopting siblings, Allison and Dawn, ages 6 and 7 respectively.

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