



COLBY FREE PRESS

School district budget survives lively hearing

By JAY KELLEY

Colby Free Press

The Colby School Board approved the 2001-02 budget on a 5-2 vote amid flaring tempers and verbal fireworks Tuesday night.

Lloyd and Ruth Theimer were the only ones on hand to protest the budget as school board president Stan Molstad opened the hearing.

Theimer, a vocal critic of the board, said, "Tonight, I'm going to unload the whole load of hay."

He gave board members a packet that explained the prices of commodities over the last 100 years. "Tonight," Theimer said, "I think, when you have heard a summary of what is in these packets, I think you will agree that things are terribly wrong."

According to Theimer, things started to go wrong after the devaluation of American money by President Roosevelt in 1933. The price of wheat has not kept up with the cost of doing business and taxation.

"The price of wheat (\$2.60) is only 75 cents above the 100 year average (\$1.85), yet combines cost \$250,000," he said.

"It's time that our public institutions of learning begin to recognize that spending of monies comes secondly to not taxing ourselves out of existence," he said.

During his 30-minute speech, Theimer asked the board how many in the district would work for the wages earned during the depression, then said, "that's the price of wheat."

Theimer contended farmers such as himself could no longer afford the taxes being levied and were in danger of losing their farms if they increased.

He also told the board that the taxation was a real burden on a population that is decreasing.

"Somewhere along the line we won't need what we have for education because there won't be anybody here," he said. After Theimer finished, board member Bill Miller asked Jo DeYoung, business manager for the school district about the limit of authority on a



JAY KELLEY/Colby Free Press

There were a lot of no-shows at Tuesday night's Colby School District budget hearing as evidenced in this photo. The only people present to question the budget were Lloyd and Ruth Theimer, district patrons. The budget was approved on a 5-2 vote.

local option budget before a public vote was required.

DeYoung answered that it was a little more than \$900,000 and Miller asked superintendent Kirk Nielsen, "What do we do then?"

"When you hit the ceiling, you have to cut something," Nielsen said, adding, "We have cut positions every year."

Miller answered, "I guess I'd like to hit that ceiling a little slower."

Miller also asked how the increase in the budget was justified in light of the opposition to a new building in the high school on the grounds of not wanting to increase taxes.

"We don't have a choice," answered Nielsen. Board member Wilburn Holloway brought up administrative

costs and fireworks erupted.

Holloway asked Nielsen to name one administrative position that had been cut and Nielsen said none.

"In fact, we've added administrators," said Holloway. Nielsen disputed that claim hotly, saying they had added some secretaries, but no new administrators. Holloway changed tack and brought up recent events at the Brew-

ster school system. "They ran out of money last year, so they got rid of the superintendent and principal and hired one person to do both jobs. You've raised the budget to get your 5-8 percent (salary) increase."

Board member Cathy Gordon asked, "How many students do they have?"

Nielsen asked about the technology Brewster used and what it cost, to which Holloway replied, "They have computers."

"I just want to make sure we're comparing apples to apples here," said Nielsen.

"A lot of our budget is technology, and you have always supported technology," he added. "Maybe we should get rid of technology."

"Sure, fire the teachers and hire more administrators, that's what you want," Holloway retorted.

Theimer told the board, "I thought I was clear that Colby isn't alone, agriculture had more problems than any of you."

Molstad reminded Holloway that the two of them had worked on teachers' salaries during negotiations, raising them \$105,000 and asked, "Where did you think that money was coming from?"

Board member Gerry Fulwider told Holloway, "Mr. Theimer believes what he has been telling us. He is fighting for his survival. Bill (Miller) is sincere in his comments, but I grow weary of your personal agenda to remove one administrator."

"You attacked my wife at the last meeting, is that all right?" said Holloway.

Molstad intervened, saying, "That's it! We're not talking about budget anymore."

Theimer told the board he was paying \$3,000 in taxes for the college and high school, services he didn't use.

DeYoung reminded him that his grandchildren do use the services, to which he replied, "I got a better education than they are getting. The Theimer family has built three high schools, when does it end?"

He also claimed the school's technology program was spoiling the kids. "No child in Colby will go into the real world and get this (level) technology."

Chris Latta, Colby High School vocal teacher who was on hand for another meeting, disputed that, saying his hometown of Omaha would like to be able to give their students this education.

Theimer told the board that IBM had told former Representative Gayle Mollenkamp not to "waste money on technology."

Latta replied, "Talk to Wayne Wiens (technology teacher), they're teaching what IBM told them to (at the high school.)"

Miller added on a recent trip to Iowa and eastern Nebraska he had discovered taxes much higher with commodity prices lower.

Tempers again flared when the budget came up for a vote.

Holloway said he would not vote for the budget and asked, "When did the board work on the budget?"

Molstad replied, "The door (to the business office) is open day and night."

Theimer jumped to his feet and claimed, "That's a secret meeting, the board doesn't have that right."

Molstad retorted, "It's a violation for a board member to talk to the business manager?"

"That's not what I said," Theimer claimed, but would not retract his statement that the board would end up violating the law.

Holloway claimed, "I went to Kirk (Nielsen) right after I got on the board and he told me my vote didn't count."

"I didn't, I said you needed three more votes," Nielsen replied.

"Discussion is what this meeting is about," said Theimer, "this board has the right to turn the budget down."

After another heated exchange in which Molstad told Theimer he was out of order and he refused to acknowledge it until he was ignored, the board voted 5-2 to pass the budget, with Holloway and Miller the dissenting votes.

Commissioners act

Some trucks could be in trouble using roads in Thomas County

By MAXINE NELSON

Colby Free Press

After a 15-minute executive session with County Attorney Allan Taylor to discuss litigation, the Thomas County Commissioners said at their Tuesday meeting that they intend to enforce a resolution prohibiting traffic on county roads by heavy trucks which do not have a destination in Thomas County. They want these trucks to use state or federal highways which are designed to carry heavy loads.

The resolution was passed because semis can weigh up to 85,000 pounds. County roads do not have the base to handle that kind of weight constantly, the commissioners said, noting that

state and federal highways do. The resolution does not prohibit trucks traveling within the county, or making deliveries or pickups in the county, commissioners said.

"Our county roads are not designed for trucks weighing 85,000 pounds, doing 55 miles per hour (the speed limit on county roads) or faster," said commission chair Ron Evans.

"It costs \$40,000 to build a mile of good road and the taxpayers of Thomas County should not have to pay to repair roads torn up by trucks not doing business in the county."

Commissioner Glen Kersenbrock added, "We do not have enough money to build roads to handle that kind of

traffic.

But we do want to take care of our farmers and local traffic."

In other business:

- The commissioners spent some time trying to confirm a rumor, but were not able to do so. Responding to a hearsay information that the Community Corrections office in Colby was going to be closed, they called Peggy Pratt, Northwest Kansas Juvenile Services director in Oberlin, who said she knew nothing about closing the office.
- They then called John Trembley, director of Northwest Kansas Community Corrections, who said he knew nothing of such a closing.

Pratt said she wanted to clear up an-

other misconception. She said Big Brothers Big Sisters had asked RC&D to assist with writing a grant for funding, and implied their funding had been cut by Juvenile Justice. She said Big Brothers Big Sisters had been funded through a startup grant from the Kansas Advisory Group, and not by Juvenile Justice.

- Rosalie Seemann brought a proclamation declaring September Genesis of Thomas County Month.

She said Genesis had been organized in 1993 to help provide food for needy persons.

They recently received another freezer, and a refrigerator and wanted to encourage people to donate food, to

include perishables and frozen food.

The Genesis-Thomas County Food Bank is located in the Thomas County Office Complex, 350 S. Range, Suite 8. Food Bank hours are Wednesdays 10 a.m.-noon and 1 p.m.-4 p.m.

The Food Bank provides food for Thomas County residents.

Food and assistance for transients is available at the Law Enforcement Center.

- The commissioners did some research to find out if the name of Beulah Cemetery is really Beulah Cemetery. According to Seemann, in 1963 the Colby Cemetery District Number 1 was organized to provide structure and taxing authority for care of the cem-

etery. She questioned if the name of the cemetery is 'Colby Cemetery.' The commissioners could find no evidence of a name change and decided to leave the decision up to the cemetery board.

The cemetery board is taking donations to build an archway at the east entrance of the cemetery on Country Club Drive.

Any surplus money collected will go toward finishing the wrought iron fence which is going up around the cemetery.

The commissioners will meet next at 9 a.m. Monday in the commissioners room of the courthouse.

All meetings are open to the public, and input is appreciated.

Gray County wind farm has impact

MONTEZUMA (AP) — It's not working at full capacity yet, but construction of a wind farm has already had a positive impact on the economy of Gray County.

Restaurants, gas stations and hardware stores in the area report increased business from construction workers building the Gray County Wind Farm.

"Basically in a small community, you are always looking for something new," said Montezuma Mayor Chester Wiswell.

"We live in a time when economic

change is taking place, and something like the wind farm is a change. This is something that is quite visible and can be seen by those driving down the highway."

Wiswell said hotels in Dodge City have also benefitted from construction workers and curious passersby who stop to look at the wind farm.

Doni Berg, manager of the Cornerstone Cafe, said the wind farm has definitely helped her business.

"It has boosted our business about \$50 a day," she said. "We have even

had several sightseers come in for lunch, so we have met a lot of new people that way. The wind farm has just been really good for business."

Kim Legleiter, director of Stauth Memorial Museum in Montezuma, said the wind farm has also increased traffic at the museum, especially on weekends.

The project will also help farmers who have turbines on their land. They will receive a certain amount of money each year for each turbine that sits on their land.

Council approves software upgrades

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

The Colby City Council approved the purchase of wide area network testing equipment, along with software updates at its meeting Tuesday night.

Carolyn Armstrong, city manager, said that tracking problems with a computer on the wide area network have prompted the need for the purchase. "This item was budgeted for 2002," she said, "but it is rapidly be-

coming apparent we need the equipment now."

Following council's approval, Mike Albers, technology director, was directed to have a representative demonstrate the options in order to determine what piece of equipment is needed. The cost is estimated at \$5,600 to \$6,500 with money being used from the Municipal Equipment Reserve Fund for computer upgrades.

In addition, Albers spoke about the need in upgrading the software used for

general ledger, payroll, and accounts payable.

The upgrade, he said, would basically move the systems form a DOS-based program to a Windows-based program.

Configuring the new system has been completed, Albers said. The other upgrades would include migrating the current version to the new server and doing a data conversion. The estimated cost of the upgrade would be about \$7,000.

Briefly

Weather: Cooler

Much cooler weather is expected to move into the Colby area as the weekend nears, says the National Weather Service. But before then, look for hot and windy conditions. Tonight, partly cloudy, lows around 60 and south winds 10-20 mph. Thursday, partly sunny, very windy 15-25 mph out of the south with gusts up to around 35 mph and very warm with highs up to 95 possible.

Thursday night, cloudy, a 30 percent chance for thunderstorms and lows near 60. Friday, thunderstorms possible with highs only in the 70s. Saturday and Sunday, overnight lows could dip down to around 45, with highs in the upper 70s to maybe 80. Tuesday's high in Colby was 91 and the overnight low this morning was 55. There was no additional

precipitation. The records for Sept. 5: 108 in 1931 (the highest recorded temperature in Colby for the month of September) and 40 in 1962. *(The daily temperatures, precipitation and records are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)*

Auditions set at college

Auditions for the upcoming performance "Heaven Can Wait" will be held next week at Colby Community College, said Debbie Schwanke, public information director. Actors are needed to fill a variety of parts in this play with auditions planned for Monday and Tuesday, Sept. 10 and 11, at 7 p.m. in the Cultural Arts Building on the campus. For questions, call Walter Yuhre, drama department, 462-3968.

Man found dead in his home

HOXIE — Richard Jones, 35, of Hoxie was found dead in his home at about 7 p.m., on Monday, Sept. 3, authorities said Tuesday.

Hoxie Police Chief John Bieker said that at this time it is not believed the death was due to any criminal action. No other details were provided.

College pool still closed

The Colby Community College pool remains closed for repairs and renovation, and maintenance director Eugene Robert said he is hoping to have the pool reopened by Monday, Sept. 10.

Siren tests announced

The Thomas County tornado sirens will be tested at 10 a.m. on Monday, Sept. 10, if the weather is clear, according to John Lygeros, emergency management coordinator.

Veterans benefits to be outlined

The American Legion is conducting its annual Kansas Veterans Affairs Tours and will stop in Colby at 6 p.m., Sunday, Sept. 9, at 1850 W. 4th.

Officials said that all veterans and their families are invited to attend this meeting and learn more about the latest changes in veterans' benefits, filing claims, and enrolling in the health care system.

