

Picking the prize



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Matt Hull, right, watched Chris Griggs pick a prize during the Community Awareness Team's free smoke-free bingo Saturday night. The event was at the Jaycee's Center, which was one of

the sponsors for the event. Prizes included a DVD player, stereo, television, household items, DVDs and compact discs. Carla Sharp, director, said she was pleased with the turnout.

GOP school plan shifts decisions to districts

By JOHN HANNA

AP Political Writer

TOPEKA (AP)—House Republican leaders act these days like parents who are oblivious to the faults of their children.

Speaker Doug Mays and his colleagues won't acknowledge the flaws in their offspring, a \$92 million school finance plan, even though the defects seem obvious to others who examine the proposal. Most of the flaws involve the plan's heavy reliance — to the tune of up to \$64 million — on local property taxes to provide extra money for schools.

House GOP leaders have fashioned a plan that passes important state decisions about education spending to local school boards, letting them make the difficult choices.

Under the plan, school districts would be allowed to increase spending on special-education programs by up to \$40.5 million, but districts would have to reduce or eliminate a property tax break for homeowners to get some of the funds. Kansas currently exempts the first \$2,300 of a residential property's assessed value from the state's school levy, saving owners \$46 a year.

The levy is \$20 for every \$1,000 of a residential property's assessed value.

In addition, 16 school districts mostly in northeast Kansas would be able to raise their property taxes by up to \$23.5 million because — in theory — the cost of living in those districts is higher than in the rest of the state and teachers need higher salaries.

Mays, R-Topeka, and other GOP leaders in the House give plenty of reasons why their plan is a good short-term fix, and with an 80-45 majority in their chamber, might see it pass.

However, the plan has gained no widespread bipartisan respect.

"This is the worst possible solution you could have to fund schools," Senate Minority Leader Anthony Hensley, D-Topeka, said after reviewing the plan last week.

Pressure to pass a school finance plan comes from education officials.

Tough financial times have left state aid to school districts stranded at \$3,863 for two years, as higher salaries and insurance costs have eaten into districts' budgets.

In Mays' home school district in Topeka, officials project that costs of current programs will outstrip revenues by \$7 million for the 2004-05 school year if the Legislature provides no additional funding. On Friday, in hopes of saving money, the district announced it would kill a summer school program that helps poor students who are struggling.

Pressure also comes from a lawsuit filed against the state in 1999 by the Dodge City and Salina school districts.

Shawnee County District Judge Terry Bullock ruled in December that the state's school finance formula is constitutionally flawed, hurting poor and minority students the most. Bullock also concluded that the state might need to increase its \$2.6 billion in aid by as much as \$1 billion.

The state has appealed the ruling

Analysis

to the Kansas Supreme Court, but Gov. Kathleen Sebelius and her fellow Democrats contend the high court is more likely to defer to the Legislature if it makes a good faith effort to address Bullock's order.

Democrats have a plan to defend — Sebelius' proposal to raise sales, property and individual income taxes and phase in a \$304 million increase in education spending over three years.

While higher property taxes would raise \$50 million over three years under her plan, the state would be imposing the increases, not local districts.

Meanwhile, GOP leaders must forge a majority from a diverse group that includes rural legislators who don't want their districts to lose any money, anti-tax conservatives, conservatives who are suspicious of public schools on principle and Johnson County moderates with sometimes stunningly parochial views.

Senate Republican leaders drafted a \$65.1 million plan that avoids local property taxes. But their proposal includes between \$20 million and \$22 million in

higher liquor taxes — a deal-killer in the House, leaders there say.

House GOP leaders said they wanted to avoid a statewide tax increase because the recovering economy remains too fragile.

As for forcing local boards of education to raise local property taxes, Mays said in an interview, "That's the traditional means of funding schools."

However, in a 1994 decision on school finance, the Supreme Court said the Kansas Constitution gives the state the responsibility to fund schools adequately enough to provide a "suitable" education to all children. Bullock's December ruling starts with that premise.

Even fairly green legislators understand.

"The state needs to support education," said freshman Rep. Roger Reitz, R-Manhattan. "The state really is responsible and has to think in terms of what's best for all the kids in Kansas."

Yet Mays refused to concede the point. He said local boards of education have been always been held responsible for funding schools. Reminded of the 1994 decision,

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University plans review of cadaver program

LAWRENCE (AP) — University of Kansas officials say they are reviewing their cadaver program to make sure that extra bodies are used according to donors' wishes.

The company that deals with the university's extra cadavers, National Anatomical Service, is accused of misusing seven cadavers obtained from Tulane University's medical school.

Officials have said the seven cadavers were sold to the Army and blown up in land mine experiments. Tulane has since suspended their relationship with National Anatomical Service, a New York-based company that distributes bodies nationwide.

Funeral director John Vincent Scalia, who owns National Anatomical Service, has assured the University of Kansas that its bodies were used as intended.

In a letter sent to school officials earlier this month, he wrote, " ...

ALL cadavers transported over the years from your school by our organization, were used only in medical school programs and basic anatomy courses."

University officials said they believe Scalia's assurances, but are "doing everything humanly possible" to make sure the bodies were used as donors intended.

"As far as we can tell, there's been no breach of our understanding or contract with anyone who's dealt with our material," said Dale Abrahamson, who oversees the university's program and is chairman of its anatomy and cell biology department.

Public Notice

IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF THOMAS COUNTY, KANSAS

In the Matter of the Estate of Kerry M. Reiley aka Kerry Michael Reiley, Deceased.

NOTICE OF HEARING ON PETITION FOR FINAL SETTLEMENT

No. 03-P-11

The State of Kansas to All Persons Concerned:

You are hereby notified that a petition has been filed on March 18, 2004, in this Court by Izetta M. Rummel, administrator of the estate of Kerry M. Reiley a/k/a Kerry Michael Reiley, deceased, praying for a final settlement of the estate, approval of her acts, proceedings and accounts as administrator, allowance for attorneys' fees and expenses, determination of the heirs, devisees, and legatees entitled to the estate and assignment to them in accordance with the Will of Kerry M. Reiley a/k/a Kerry Michael Reiley, deceased. You are hereby required to file your written defenses thereto on or before April 13, 2004, at 10:00 o'clock AM, on such day, in such Court, in the City of Colby, in Thomas County, at which time and place such cause will be heard. Should you fail therein, judgment and decree will be entered in due course upon said petition.

LARRY LOFTUS
PETITIONER

IZETTA M. RUMMEL
PETITIONER

Submitted by:
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(Published in The Colby Free Press on March 22, 29, and April 5, 2004)

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