

State's debt rose during 1990s — and continues to climb

By JOHN HANNA

Associated Press Writer

TOPEKA (AP) — Kansas used to have the least debt-ridden state government in the nation, with less than \$200 in bonds to pay off per resident. Most states had at least five times as much per person.

But starting in the 1990s, faced with low interest rates, Kansas, like other states, issued bonds in earnest to finance better highways and bridges, repairs on state university campuses and even a restoration of the State Capitol.

The Sunflower State's debt per resident ballooned by 333 percent from 1992 to 2002, faster than any other state's, according to U.S. Census Bureau figures. Kansas' per capita debt grew more than twice as fast as that of its nearest rival, Texas.

And Kansas continues to float more bonds — about \$1.2 billion in the past two years alone. The State Budget Division now calculates that at the end of the current fiscal year, on June 30, 2005, the state will have \$3.71 billion in bonds to pay off.

"You just have to start wondering at what point Kansans need to be concerned," State Treasurer Lynn Jenkins said. "We may be getting there."

The rise in Kansas' debt has at

least started a debate about the burden.

One legislator, Sen. Henry Helgeson, compared the state to a family that has used its full limit on one credit card and is getting ready to max out another.

"It's a financial time bomb that's probably going to catch up with us sometime in the next four or five years," he said.

While State Budget Director Duane Goossen agrees that bond payments will represent a fiscal issue in the near future, he said the state has yet to overly burden itself.

Across the nation, states collectively have been issuing more debt. According to the census figures, state bonded debt increased from \$372 billion at the end of the states' 1992 fiscal years to nearly \$641 billion by the end of fiscal 2002. That's about 72 percent.

In recent months, California has received the most attention because in March its voters approved a plan to issue \$15 billion in bonds to help solve that state's ongoing budget problems.

While Kansas' borrowing has been on a much smaller scale, it is in some ways more dramatic, given the state's history.

In fact, according to the census, at the end of its 1992 fiscal year,

Officials warn boaters about carbon monoxide

TOPEKA (AP) — State health officials have added carbon monoxide to a list of potential hazards such as alcohol, heat and reckless boating that boaters and swimmers need to watch out for this summer.

A week after Melissa Kennedy, 34, of Holton, succumbed to the odorless, colorless gas and drowned at Perry Lake, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment warned that carbon monoxide can build to lethal levels in windless conditions.

"At high concentrations, carbon monoxide can be fatal in two or three breaths," said Lori Haskett, the department's injury prevention director.

Jefferson County Sheriff Roy Dunnaway said Kennedy drowned

in the lake's Slough Creek area where several boats were docked and operating gas-powered generators. Without any breeze, carbon monoxide gathered near the water, causing Kennedy to pass out.

Another woman also passed out and slipped underwater but was pulled to safety, and a girl passed out on board a boat.

"The carbon monoxide was just sitting there," Haskett said Friday. "Usually, you're in the wind and (the gas) is able to escape, but it was just kind of hovering."

Haskett described the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning as similar to motion sickness or being under the influence of alcohol. She said someone feeling those symptoms should get fresh air quickly.

Wichita's library owed nearly \$2 million in fines

WICHITA (AP) — An overdue book here. A forgotten videocassette or DVD there. Unpaid fines everywhere.

If everything were brought back and every account settled, the revenue from fines and the value of the Wichita Public Library's missing materials would amount to just under \$2 million — enough to stock its shelves for two years.

The library is missing almost 26,000 items, some for years — and it's about to crack down.

An additional 6,000 unpaid accounts are due to be turned over to a collection agency, and this month the library increased some overdue fees for the first time in almost a decade.

"We always hope first of all to get

the material," library director Cynthia Berner Harris said.

Wichita now charges a 25-cent daily late fee on books, which the city expects to bring in an extra \$112,000 this year.

Most overdue offenders owe less than \$20, but some have gone well over that amount.

One reader checked out 124 items nearly 10 years ago and never brought them back — incurring \$2,430 in fines and lost materials fees, Berner Harris said. Five others owe more than \$1,000 each.

The library now refers overdue accounts of \$40 or more — there are 11,000 of those — to a collection agency. Next year's proposed library budget suggests dropping the threshold to \$25.

Cancer not slowing down rodeo coordinator

MCCRACKEN (AP) — Jack Wilson calls cancer "a little bug" he's trying to kick and downplays its importance to the award-winning McCracken Rodeo.

But those who know the 71-year-old rodeo coordinator are used to his humility and say the McCracken resident is perhaps the biggest part of the annual hometown event, which ran Friday and Saturday.

"He's the rodeo," said Jackie Casey, who helps out with the rodeo. "When people hear him on the radio, they know."

Wilson probably had cancer during last year's rodeo, but he didn't know it yet. Though the disease has spread to his liver, lung and bones, he says "it's beginning to fade."

He rides into the rodeo each night as part of the grand entry, and rides around the ring when he's introduced before the big event. Friday night, those rides were a little rocky as his new horse, Betsy Ross, kicked and bucked her way into the arena.

Wilson later laughed and said he hoped his doctor wasn't there to see that, since she has told him he can only ride a mild-mannered horse this year.

A local organizer of the rodeo said many people come to the event because of Wilson, and local sponsors all have the man for whom the rodeo arena is named on their mind.

"They ask about Jack. Jack, Jack, Jack," said Jerilyn Stull. "When they see him, they know it's rodeo time."

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“ You just have to start wondering at what point Kansans need to be concerned. We may be getting there.”

Lynn Jenkins,
Kansas State Treasurer

Kansas had less than \$486 million in bonds to pay off, about \$195 for every resident. The Census Bureau said Texas had the next-lowest per capita amount, at \$461.

By 2002, according to the census, Kansas' debt had risen to \$2.29 billion, and its per capita figure to \$844. Both Tennessee, at \$627, and Arizona, at \$799, had lower figures. Texas' per capita figure rose nearly 140 percent, to \$1,104.

At the end of 2005, if the state's population grew as it did in 2003, the state's per capita debt figure would jump to \$1,352.

Bart Hildreth, a public finance professor at Wichita State Univer-

sity, called the increase a "warning flag" for Kansas. He is a former board member for the Kansas Development Finance Authority, which issues bonds for most state agencies.

Hildreth is not sure how much of a financial problem Kansas' burgeoning debt represents yet — and is in fact doing research on how much the state might be able to issue in bonds before causing a crisis.

But he said legislators and other state officials now need to consider the state's overall borrowing capacity.

"It's something we should watch," he said during an interview.



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COLLEGE DRIVE ASSEMBLY OF GOD, Interim Pastor, Dean McCormick, 245 W. College Dr. - 462-8234, Sunday School 9:30 a.m., Morning Worship - 10:30 a.m.

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FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, Rev. Bradley L. Herndon, Grant & Webster Street, 462-2867, Morning Worship 10:30 a.m., Sunday School 9:15 a.m., Evening Worship 6:30 p.m., Wednesday Bible 7:30 p.m.

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CHURCH OF CHRIST, 510 E. 4th, Jay Kelley, minister, Sunday Bible Study 9:30 a.m., Sunday Worship 10:30 a.m., Sunday Eve. Worship 6:00 p.m., Wednesday, Bible Study 7:00 p.m.

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH, (Disciples of Christ), 385 W. 3rd - 460-2718, Sunday Morn-

ing Worship at 9:00 a.m.; Sunday School at 10:15 a.m. E-mail: fcccolby@st-tel.net

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OUR SAVIORS LUTHERAN CHURCH Brewster, Sunday Worship 9 a.m., Sunday School 10 a.m.

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LEVANT COMMUNITY CHURCH, Pastor Jerry Vincent, 586-2376, Sunday School 9:30 a.m., Morning worship 10:30 a.m.

WINONA METHODIST CHURCH, Rev. Michael Eurit, Sunday School, 10:30 a.m., Morning Worship 9:30 a.m. (CDT)

BREWSTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, PO Box 250, Brewster. Pastor Dorine Chambers, 785-462-6044, Sunday School, 9:45 a.m., Morning Worship, 10:45 a.m.

THE SHEPHERD'S STAFF, REXFORD, Mr. Bob Leach, Director, 687-2565

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