



COLBY FREE PRESS



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Bert Stramel of Colby, who organized the legislative town meeting at Quality Inn on Saturday, spoke with Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer

after the event. Pictured between the two men was Ostmeyer's daughter, Chris Niblock of Hoxie.

Legislators talk about current bills

By Patty Decker

Free Press Editor

With the midpoint of the legislative session approaching, Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer and Rep. Jim Morrison spent Saturday visiting constituents in Goodland, Colby, Hoxie, Hill City and Plainville.

Also known as "turnaround," next week marks the deadline for most bills to clear their originating chambers in order to stand a chance of final passage.

At the Colby meeting, about 30 people listened as Ostmeyer spoke about the state budget, education, methamphetamine labs, ethanol, and economic development while Morrison talked about health care.

Although there was talk about money from gambling being used for education, Ostmeyer said most legislators working on bill "don't want to go there."

"I would rather we raise sales tax then depend on gambling," he said. "During the last week, we have been spending two and a half hours a day on education (to create a plan answering the Kansas Supreme Court decision on providing more money to schools)."

Among the topics discussed in committee, administrative waste, consolidation and weighting were all looked at, he said. As for administrative waste, most legislators see some, but there's not enough to affect the budget to the

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Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer (Grinnell)

extent needed for funding.

"I don't believe we are looking at mass consolidation either," Ostmeyer said. "However, if there is consolidation in the eastern part of the state, it will affect us too."

One plan would be to phase in \$415 million more to schools over a three-year period. In the first year, the plan would rely on existing money and the state's cash reserve. Yet in the second and third years, no decision has been made on how the state would pay.

Either way, the legislature has until Tuesday, April 12, to come up with something fair to all districts, according to the court's challenge.

Another bill that Ostmeyer spoke about dealt with methamphetamine labs and getting sudafed, one of the active ingredients in the cooking process, off the shelves and into a more controlled method when buying it.

"We have a problem with these labs and there are thousands of them across the state," he said. "Nobody in the legislature is balking about doing something to limit the number of boxes a person can buy at the store."

Ostmeyer touched on economic development and how hiring teachers with emphasis in math and science during the summer months could be a benefit.

"It would also bring our younger folks back out here," he said.

There is also an ethanol bill, which is supported by Farm Bureau. Ethanol, which is used as a fuel additive and has a higher octane level, comes primarily from corn. The legislation would allow gas stations to use ethanol without having to report that on the gas sticker at the pump.

Morrison said health care is the single most important issue of a person's life. "Without health," he said, "you die."

As chairman of the health committee, Morrison said, the challenge is to come up with issues that will improve accessibility, affordability and availability in order for Kansans to remain healthy.

"Tort reform won't solve the health care problem," he said. "It isn't lawsuits that are creating the liability problem — it's providers driving the costs up by over utilization of services."

Morrison said that surgi-centers compete against hospitals and hospitals here and around the state are in trouble. Another over utilization of services is use of emergency room care and whether or not it's necessary in every situation.

Another area of legislation regards the scope of practice for advanced registered nurse practitioners and using their skills in writing prescriptions. Also the county health departments could work with indigent and low-income families in providing health care. "It's a good bill and I think talking with doctors this can be worked out," Morrison said.

Over time this could mean you would see doctors or registered nurse practitioners for anything from a sore throat to brain surgery.

"Some background on part of the issues in HB2256 is in the Jan. 31-Feb. 7 issue of U.S. News & World Report," Morrison said. "This special health issue is worth a read."

Questions to Ostmeyer and Morrison ranged from energy and water rights to local controls on irrigation, school issues and more.

Both legislators encourage people to call them with questions. For Ostmeyer, call (785) 296-7399 and Morrison, (785) 296-7676.

Police release name of man shot in Colby

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

Authorities have released the name of the man who died during an early morning party Friday in Colby.

Colby Police Investigator Gary Shull said this morning Robert Leo Schmidt, 64, died from a gun shot wound to the head about 2:22 a.m. Friday at a residence on Country Club Drive.

"The preliminary investigation indicates Mr. Schmidt's death was a result of an accidental self-inflicted gun shot," Shull said.

Authorities have not ruled out that a game of Russian Roulette may have led to Schmidt's death, Shull said.

"We don't know for sure. There was gun play and there were two guns they were looking at.

"We'll have to wait on the toxicology report about how things happened," Shull said.

A 911 call made by Michael Vedro, 47, Colby, alerted authorities about Schmidt being shot, Shull

said today.

Vedro, along with Jarrod Taylor, 25, also of Colby, were witnesses to the shooting. Taylor is the son of Thomas County Sheriff Deputy Rod Taylor.

Shull said alcohol is suspected as a contributing factor in Schmidt's death, and an autopsy of his body was performed in Hays on Friday.

As of this morning, results of the autopsy had not been received by the police department.

In addition to alcohol tests being conducted, toxicology reports were ordered.

"We have no reason to believe there was any illegal drugs (at the party), but there was alcohol consumed earlier in the evening," Shull said.

Once all reports are completed, they will be forwarded to Thomas County Attorney Andres Wyrick for her review, Shull said.

The shooting is being investigated by the Colby Police Department and the Kansas Bureau of Investigation.

High speed chase ends in arrests, patrol car afire

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

A high speed chase on Sunday across two counties ended with two Virginia men being caught and a Kansas Highway Patrol car catching fire.

Sheridan County Sheriff's Deputy Hessel Anderson said this morning he was alerted about a gas theft in Graham County and located the suspected westbound vehicle about 6 miles east of Hoxie and started following it.

Anderson said he clocked Steven L. Rasby, 18, and David A. Davis, 20, both of Richmond, Va., traveling 82 miles per hour.

Anderson alerted Hoxie City Police Chief John Bieker that the car was headed toward Hoxie on U.S. Highway 24 shortly after 5 p.m. The car sped past Bieker and continued westbound toward Thomas County.

Anderson said the car turned south at the Rexford Road before

heading back west with officers from Logan and Thomas County, along with Kansas Highway Patrol troopers in pursuit.

Rasby and Davis were apprehended shortly after 5:30 p.m., approximately the same time Kansas Highway Patrol Trooper Doug Reed's patrol car engine compartment caught fire.

Anderson said the fire was extinguished before the Colby Fire Department arrived, but not before spreading a short way into to an adjacent field where it too was extinguished.

Conditions in the field Rasby and Davis entered and were followed by authorities required vehicles being towed out after the incident, Anderson said.

Rasby and Davis booked into the Thomas County Jail, but due to the President's Day holiday no further details were available about pending charges.

Superintendents address school financing

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

The state legislature is still trying to figure out how it's going to fund education and their progress so far is being watched closely by administrators at Thomas County schools.

Brewster school superintendent Sherri Edmundson weighed in on how the legislators are doing.

"I think they're making an honest effort but I think there is still a long way to go," she said.

After getting a look at the two

plans proposed last week, she said her biggest fear is that they might phase down low enrollment weighting. Edmundson explained schools with lower enrollment get more value during the budgeting process. If the state stopped doing that, it would mean shutting some of the smallest schools in the state.

She said even if the 100 smallest schools in the state were closed, it wouldn't make up 10 percent of the budget, and wouldn't equal one Wichita school district. It wouldn't

save any money, Edmundson said, and would only add on a transportation cost for students to be bused elsewhere to attend class.

She said it also wouldn't make sense in western Kansas because of the sparse population.

Edmundson said the funding solution needs to be "fair and equitable" to all the districts and said coming up with the money to do it shouldn't come from property tax increases.

She said sales tax would be more

fair because it would be statewide, and Edmundson doesn't think school spending can't be done without a tax increase.

Colby school superintendent Kirk Nielsen didn't offer any opinion on how things are going but said he's putting his faith in the legislature. Nielsen said he has talked with Rep. Jim Morrison, R-Colby, and said he felt good about the conversation.

"You've got to rely on them to do the right thing," he said.

Briefly

College send-off Wednesday

The community is invited to a send-off at 9 a.m. Wednesday on the Colby Community College campus for the seven Trojan wrestlers heading to the national tournament.

Commissioners to meet Tuesday

The Thomas County Commissioners will meet at 9 a.m. Tuesday at the courthouse. Items on the agenda include a presentation with Colby city manager Carolyn Armstrong on improving Willow, Franklin and Country Club; presentations on the weed department, economic development and sheriff's office and Ron Redick of Hi Plains Mental Health. The meeting is open to the public.

Pre-enrollment planned at Sacred Heart

Sacred Heart School will hold pre-enrollment for preschool and kindergarten children for the 2005-06 school year on Wednesday, March 9, in the school lobby between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. School officials ask that parent/guardians bring birth certificate, physical, social security care, and immunization records. For questions, call 460-2813.

Cancer Society's daffodil deadline near

The American Cancer Society is sponsoring its annual Daffodil Drive in Colby and Stephanie Stones and Tina Dreiling, coordinators here, will be taking orders until Tuesday, Feb. 22. To order, call (785) 460-8677 or (785) 460-8076 and leave a message. Bundles are \$10, but the society also has new offerings as well.

Colby
Hoxie
Oakley



Moisture is on the way

Tonight...Increasing clouds. Lows in the lower 30s. West winds up to 5 mph shifting to the northwest after midnight. **Tuesday...**Cloudy with a 30 percent chance of rain. Highs in the upper 30s. East winds 10 to 15 mph. **Tuesday night...**Cloudy with a 40 percent chance of snow. Lows in the mid 20s. Southeast winds 10 to 15 mph. **Wednesday...**Cloudy with a 50 percent chance of snow. Highs in the lower 30s. Southeast winds around 10 mph. **Wednesday night...**Mostly cloudy with a 30 percent chance of snow. Lows in the lower 20s. **Thursday...**Mostly cloudy. Highs in the mid 30s.

The numbers

Sunday's high, 60
Low this morning, 31
Year ago today, 59 and 20
Records for this date, 74 in 1972 and -7 in 1978
Precipitation past 24 hours to 8 a.m. today, 0.00
Precipitation for month to date: 0.34
Snowfall for month to date: 3.7 inches
Soil temperature, 43

The sources:

The forecast is from the National Weather Service, and other numbers are from the Northwest Research-Extension Center, Colby. A recorded forecast updated throughout the day is available by calling (785) 899-7119. Current temperatures are available by calling 460-TEMP.

