

Trees anyone?



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Bert Stramel, Thomas County Conservation District board member, helped with "Tree Day" distribution last weekend. The trees were made available to Colby and Thomas County residents who had placed orders prior to delivery. Beginning Sunday, the local district and others nationwide will take part in the annual Soil and Water Stewardship Week celebration. More details about this special week will appear in next week's edition of the *Free Press*. For questions about programs or to learn more about the district, call 462-7482.

Beef employees get day off to protest

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — The nation's second-largest beef processor will give more than 15,000 of its workers the day off Monday so they can take part in nationwide protests against proposed federal immigration laws, a company spokesman said.

Cargill Meat Solutions' beefpacking plant in Dodge City, Kan., will be among seven of the company's largest plants operating on a Tuesday through Saturday schedule next week, said spokesman Mark Klein. Cargill also will close plants in Iowa, Illinois, Texas, Nebraska and Colorado.

National Beef also will shut its southwest Kansas plant, giving the company's Hispanic work force the choice to participate in numerous rallies, boycotts and voter mobilization drives planned for Monday.

"It was very apparent that the emotions and passions were building and that there would be interest in May 1," said Klein, who said management and the union agreed to shift the schedule after production slowed during previous immigration rallies. "We said we were in

this with many of our employees and that we have some of the same concerns about House Bill 4437."

That legislation would make it a felony to enter the United States illegally, an issue that's driven Hispanic groups in Kansas and Missouri to organize community meetings in parks and schools to educate immigrants about the proposed reforms.

But in southwest Kansas, the call for immigrants to close their shops, walk off the job and skip school has met with mixed responses. Some groups advocated for Latinos to boycott American goods Monday to highlight the importance of immigrant workers and students.

"It's up to everybody's conscience what action they take, but I'm just trying to do my part," said Miguel Banuelos, whose clothing shop is one of about 20 businesses in a Wichita shopping center that will shut down Monday.

Numerous organizations said they planned to gather on Sunday instead, or to hold community events outside work hours Monday to encourage Hispanics to stay at

work and in class. In Topeka, immigrant rights activists decided to hold their rally on the Capitol lawn after 5:30 p.m.

"We're not gonna march and we're not gonna do any of that. We're gonna be more educational," said Elva Solis, secretary of the Regional Latino Affairs Council of Southwest Kansas in Dodge City. "We're doing this for the people who didn't get much out of April 10."

In St. Louis, grass-roots leaders said illegal immigrants were shaken by the recent deportation of Spanish-language newspaper publisher Cecilia Velazquez, who was barred from entering the U.S. for 10 years after a long legal battle over her

immigration status.

"That provoked a lot of fear and panic from within the community, and also as far as organizing events it's kind of changed people's perspective," said Kimberly McGrath, a program coordinator at Accion Social Comunitaria.

In Kansas City, a two-week-old group called Sons and Daughters of Immigrants was planning a Monday afternoon rally at the Liberty Memorial, where they said they would sign up new voters and take a "more spiritual approach" to the immigration debate. They asked supporters to place white ribbons on their car antennas, front doors and businesses as a symbol of peace.

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Congress struggles to respond to public

WASHINGTON (AP) — Lawmakers were walking a tightrope. With gasoline prices soaring they wanted to appear tough on oil companies.

But apparently not too tough. While congressional Republicans and Democrats in both the House and Senate promised to roll back billions of dollars in tax breaks for major oil companies, the House in a largely symbolic vote Thursday seemed to move in the other direction.

House Republicans refused to go along with a proposal that called on House members to accept a Senate-passed repeal of \$5 billion worth of oil industry tax breaks. They are the subject of intense negotiations between the House and Senate on a broad tax bill.

A resolution urging House negotiators to accept the Senate tax proposals failed 232-190, with only two Republicans voting for it.

Meanwhile, in the Senate, GOP leaders unveiled a 10-point plan aimed at soothing the growing election-year public anger over high gasoline prices.

It included a \$100 fuel-cost rebate for millions of taxpayers and proposals to rescind oil industry tax breaks enacted only eight months ago, and other measures.

But the plan also called for opening an Alaska wildlife refuge to oil drilling — a longtime goal of several large oil companies operating on the Alaska North Slope — to the consternation of many Democrats and moderate GOP senators, who long have opposed such a move. The drilling provision all but assured the package would have a tough time getting approved.

Democrats, meanwhile, talked of suspending the 18.4-cent federal gasoline tax for two months to ease Americans' pain at the pump.

Despite the jockeying for political advantage on the volatile issue of gasoline prices, there was little that emerged that would force down prices in the short run.

"Unfortunately there's nothing, really, that can be done that's going to affect energy prices or gasoline prices in the very short run," Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke told a congressional hearing.

Still, lawmakers scrambled to put together legislative packages they hoped would — if at times only symbolically — demonstrate their sympathy for the nation's motorists and their willingness to stand up to the big oil companies.

Despite the House vote, the oil industry tax breaks that were being negotiated between the House and Senate were "still on the table," said Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, the lead Senate negotiator.

The provisions have been an issue of contention in talks

The Senate-passed measures would require oil companies to pay more taxes on their inventories, rescind favorable tax treatment for exploration in difficult areas of the world and remove tax credits for taxes paid overseas.

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