



COLBY FREE PRESS

Governor assesses damage in Colby

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Help is on the way. Gov. Kathleen Sebelius visited Colby Wednesday during a tour of western Kansas smothered by the weekend snowstorm. That same day, the governor sent a letter to the White House asking for federal assistance to help western Kansas recover from the storm.

"The impact of this storm has been tremendous and it is critical we receive federal support to help our state recover from the significant financial losses left behind," Sebelius said.

"We will be addressing the damages and financial impact the storm has taken once critical needs have been addressed."

She met with officials and residents at the Kansas National Guard Armory. With Sebelius was Rep. Jerry Moran, R-Hays; Adjutant General Tod Bunting and Kansas Ag Secretary Adrian Polansky.

Sebelius flew to Goodland, drove to Colby and continued to Ulysses by airplane. During the storm, Sebelius declared 44 counties in western Kansas disaster areas.

Sebelius talked with Thomas County Emergency Management Director Jim Engel about the conditions in the surrounding area.

Engel said the road situation is good and there have been no major accidents.

However, Rawlins and Logan



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Rep. Jerry Moran, R-Hays, left, Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, center, and Jim Engel, Thomas County emergency management direc-

tor, discussed damage from the weekend winter storm at the Kansas National Guard Armory in Colby Wednesday.

Sebelius also requested assistance from the United States Department of Agriculture to help with livestock losses.

"There are 3.7 million head of cattle worth an estimated \$3.4 billion in the 44 counties hardest hit by

this winter storm," Sebelius said. "Averting and recovering from widespread livestock casualties is important to our state's economic stability and the well-being of our livestock producers."

Anyone needing assistance with

livestock, such as forage, generators or burial, should contact their county's emergency manager.

"The state has been a tremendous help with the National Guard," Engel said.

Colby City Manager Carolyn Armstrong thanked Sebelius for the Guard armory, which the city is using to house vehicles from the Colby Fire Department. A portion of the firehouse roof collapsed under the weight of snow Sunday.

She told the governor ice and rain contributed to the collapse, and the incident caused no problems with the department's ability to respond to emergencies. Goodland and Oakley served as a backup to Colby's department Sunday and Monday, if needed.

Sebelius asked about electrical service and if there were enough crews available to restore power to effected areas. Engel said Midwest Energy did a good job restoring power.

The governor also said FEMA assistance will be available.

Engel was pleased with Sebelius' visit.

"We pretty much have state support for what we need," he said.

Engel said Thomas County is slowly getting back to normal. Snow removal is ongoing, and so much snow could cause problems such as eventually clogging sewers or building damage.

"We're fortunate we didn't get more snow," Engel said.

Mount Colby is back!



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

A city of Colby employee used a front-end loader to pile up snow at "Mount Colby" Wednesday at the corner of Plum Street and Franklin Avenue. City officials are urging motorists to drive with caution, to watch for snow removal equipment and how snow piles can block the view of traffic.

Jail: Revise or rebuild?

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

There are as many potential questions as there are bars on the cells at the Thomas County jail.

Last month, commissioners reviewed the possibility of expanding the current jail or building a new jail. Cindy Kennedy of Goldberg, Sullivan and McCrery architect firm from Kansas City, joined the commissioners via a conference call.

"This is just an exploratory conversation," said commissioner chairman Ron Evans.

Thomas County Sheriff Mike Baughn said his department is in the initial stages of the research for both proposals. A committee will be formed to study a regional jail or if the county's jail should be expanded to meet needs. A regional jail could be used by other area counties.

Thomas County's jail is starting to show its age which impacts procedures.

Undersheriff Jason Moses said the Law Enforcement Center and jail were built in 1976. Moses said the jail has a linear design, where cells are built all in a row. That type of jail is no longer built. In respect to its design and some other issues, the jail is outdated.

"It was an appropriate design at the time it was built," Moses said.

Finances

He said the jail is in good working order, but it does have electrical and plumbing issues.

"It has taken some money to keep it that way, and the sheriff's office has done what it can to keep those costs to a minimum," he said.

The jail budget for 2007 is \$191,979, and that includes salaries, inmate housing and food, of-

fice supplies and utilities. Baughn said the budget does not include revenue that comes in from housing inmates from other counties.

The jail has 11 cells — nine regular cells and two for detox.

Moses said people who come into the jail on drugs or intoxicated are put into one of the detox cells, and later into the regular cells after they are sober. Detox cells are separated from the other cells.

Sheriff Mike Baughn said the processing procedure for male and female inmates is the same. Women inmates are housed separately from male inmates.

The jail has nine beds. If necessary, six "boats," or a mattress and frame, are put down on the floor, giving the jail capacity for up to 15 inmates.

If the jail has more people than that, additional inmates are transferred to Goodland.

"It doesn't happen very often," Baughn said.

It's not just arrests from Thomas County that ends up in the jail. Moses said the jail can house inmates from other counties. Those counties are charged \$40 per day per inmate. The cost to house Thomas County's inmates fluctuates with the cost of food and wages.

There have been as many as 19 people at the jail. Thomas County officials said most newer jails have direct supervision where an officer views inside the cell or a pod construction. Pod supervision has a control room in the center with the cells arranged around it so every

cell is visible.

Laws have changed over the years, as have sentencing guidelines and the types of activities people are arrested for. All are factors that affect a jail's operations.

Drug trafficking along Interstate 70 have lead to arrests and people being held in the jail. A potential law that might also affect local jails would require DUI offenders to be housed in their county jail for up to two years.

"Currently, the longest sentence in a county jail is one year. However, during the course of a trial and other legal proceedings, someone can be held indefinitely," Moses said.

Regional facility

If Thomas County became home to a regional jail, little would change, officials said.

Moses said the counties in northwest Kansas could come together and build a jail, but the more likely solution would be for a larger jail to be built and counties charged to house inmates.

Moses said planning for the future needs to be done now.

"It's inevitable that it's going to happen," he said.

Evans said these discussions are just the first step.

"We've got a long process," Evans said. "Maybe something will come of it, maybe not."

Jails in Doniphan, Cherokee and Rice counties were designed and by Goldberg, Sullivan and McCrery.

Financing such a project was also discussed. Kennedy asked if a jail would be paid for with sales tax. Evans said it would probably be a bond issue. "We haven't thought that far ahead," Baughn said.

Commissioner Paul Steele said a sales tax increase would be a "hard-sell" to voters.



J. Moses

Eastern Kansas relatives help out distraught Rexford women

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

Two Rexford sisters weathered the storm in Selden after a relative in eastern Kansas learned their homes were without electricity. Power went out in Rexford about 3:30 a.m. Friday, and it was not restored until about 10 p.m. Monday.

Vesta Roth, 76, and Jean Hawkins, 81, spent two nights in Selden after Roth's son, Dan, learned his mother and aunt were without heat in their homes. Not

able to reach the women because Interstate 70 was closed from Salina to Denver, Dan called he another relative to help the ladies.

"Dan called and found out I was without electricity, so he called Rodney and Rodney came and got my sister and me," Vesta Roth said.

Since Dan Roth, and his wife, Janice, of Abilene, could not get to his mother and aunt they asked Janice's brother, Rodney Brantley of Selden, to look after the two women.

"Rodney came and got us and

"We had a bad storm in 1960, but we haven't had one like this in a long time."

Jean Hawkins, Rexford

took us to his house," Vesta Roth said. "His house is large and we had plenty of room and it was warm."

Both ladies said they are used to Kansas winters.

They left water running slightly to keep pipes from freezing. And

they turned the thermostat on their forced air furnaces down because of not knowing when the electricity would be restored.

Once I-70 opened, Dan Roth on Monday was able to make it to Rexford and he placed small space

heaters in the women's homes so when electricity was restored they would have instant heat. Having to work Tuesday, Vesta said her son returned to Abilene Monday, but Brantley took them home Tuesday morning.

"I'm really thankful for all they did," Vesta said of both men's efforts. "Everything seems to be OK."

Hawkins said she and her sister grew up on a farm which did not have electricity as it is known today. In fact, although their parents had a refrigerator and freezer, they were

powered by propane, not electricity.

"Dad had a power plant and as long as we were careful, we had power," Hawkins said.

She said she the storm is unlike one she can remember in the past 40 years. Hawkins moved to Rexford in 1989, having lived on a farm prior to then.

"We had a bad storm in 1960, but we haven't had one like this in a long time," Hawkins said.

Glad to be home and have the power back on, Hawkins said both her freezer and home "are fine."