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Legislators, lobbyists not happy with funds

TOPEKA (AP) — An unprecedented three-year, \$466 million boost to school funding approved last year might have been enough to satisfy the Kansas Supreme Court, but school lobbyists and some lawmakers are far from happy with the deal.

Legislators from wealthy districts say the funding increase is unfair to them, while supporters of smaller districts say the wealthy districts came out much better than those in less-populated, poorer areas.

Kathy Cook, executive director of Kansas Families United for Public Education, which lobbied for funding increases, said there still are “unresolved issues” in the school finance plan.

“It is simply because legislators put together a plan based on politics and not the actual costs of educating students,” Cook said.

The funding increase was in response to a state Supreme Court ruling that the school finance system was underfunded and unfairly distributed money.

The plan approved last year increased the amount of money sent to schools with higher numbers of special education students and those considered at risk of failing.

Before the Kansas House voted last week to lock in the final two years of funding for the three-year plan, Rep. Anthony Brown, R-Eudora, and several Johnson County representatives voiced their displeasure.

“Under this plan, Johnson County will provide one-third of the money, educate one-fifth of the kids and receive less than one-tenth of state dollars,” the group said in a statement before voting against the legislation.

But poorer districts are upset because the new finance plan allows districts to increase their local taxes to add to their overall education funding.

They argue that wealthy districts can afford to increase taxes much easier than the poorer districts can.

“This inherent disadvantage to poorer school districts will surely be the seeds of a future lawsuit,” said Bill Reardon, a lobbyist for Kansas City, Kan., public schools.

He said it’s especially upsetting that part of the law allows 18 school districts to increase local property taxes because of the higher cost of living in those districts.

Birthday party!



ABOVE: Kimber Robbin and Sabrina Eicher, kindergartners at Colby Grade School, made tin punches today as part of Kansas Day activities.

RIGHT: Courtney Heinrich of Colby used a wheat grinder to make flour Sunday during Kansas Day festivities at the Prairie Museum of Art and History. Kansas became a state Jan. 29, 1861.



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Roads worry Sheridan County

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

Storm clean up in Sheridan County may mean different hours for road and bridge department workers and the landfill.

Almost to the point of an argument, Sheridan County Commissioners David Zimmerman, Ron Schamberger and Keith Kennedy told Bob Schwarz, road and bridge supervisor, they want the county’s roads in better condition as soon as possible.

Schamberger suggested having road and bridge crews work 10 a.m. until 6 p.m. so roads could be worked after they thaw in the morning. He told Schwarz he has used his own equipment to work on roads near his property northeast of Hoxie.

Schwarz was not in favor of the change and argued changing hours would not help with roadwork.

Zimmerman said temporarily changing hours would help get “get rid of rough spots.”

“We make adjustments every day,” Schwarz said. “But some people get stuck in their section and they don’t like to help others out.”

“But you are the boss, Bob,” Schamberger said.

Commissioners told Schwarz to look at temporarily changing the hours the landfill is open in order to put landfill workers to work on roads. The landfill is currently open from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Schwarz said changing landfill hours is an option but does not plan to make the change immediately.

Kennedy wanted to know whether Schwarz had used road drags to try and knock down high spots, to which Schwarz said he had not. But Schwarz said the county needs to buy a snow blower and has looked at one 8-foot wide costing \$9,700.

The commissioners nixed Schwarz’s idea saying current equipment would do the job since a snow blower would be used sporadically. However, Zimmerman and Schamberger said they would consider a snow blower if it did not cost so much.

Schwarz told the commissioners he expects the storm clean up process will exceed \$59,000, which would meet the guideline of the Federal Emergency Management Agency for a large project.

At a meeting Wednesday in Hoxie, state and federal officials outlined guidelines for projects which qualify for reimbursement money from state and federal agencies. Schwarz reiterated what was said at that meeting that federal money could total 75 percent of a project, state money at 15 percent, leaving 10 percent of the bill to be paid by the county for debris removal, road and bridge repair and other damage from the Dec. 28-31 storm.

“I haven’t talked with anyone from the state and I don’t know what the electric company will do about the clean up,” Schwarz said. “I think the electric company will pick up transformers and I don’t know what they’ll do about the rest. We’ll probably have to clean it up.”

“I hope not,” Zimmerman said. Schwarz and the commissioners talked about hiring another person for the road and bridge department due to the current overload of work needing done within the county. He said he would like to hire three people, but the commissioners did not set a number to consider.

Zimmerman said ads would be run and applications would be considered.

“We’ll do whatever it takes to get through this,” Kennedy said.

Saddle up



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Miss Kansas Rodeo Amy Wilson introduced youth to compete in a stickhorse race competition Saturday during the celebration and ceremony of her being named Miss Kansas Rodeo. Wilson, a Colby Community College student, will spend the year traveling the country promoting Kansas and rodeos at various events. Wilson was officially sworn in Saturday at the Colby American Legion. A dinner, dance and fund raising for Wilson’s expenses while being Miss Kansas Rodeo were also held.

Sheridan County ballot to be short on names

Sheridan County’s April 3 ballot is expected to be short several names for various public offices which are up for election.

Only one person is running for three seats on the local hospital board of trustees.

Hoxie’s school board looks to be one member short as well. Having missed the deadline Tuesday, anyone wanting to fill open seats must run a write-in campaign.

Individuals who met the deadline were as follows. All but Gregg Jones are incumbent candidates:

Sheridan County Hospital Board (3 positions open):

Allen Neal
Hoxie Water Commissioner (1 position):
Jim Erwin, Gregg Jones
Hoxie School District (Member-At-Large, 4 positions):
Leonard Weber, Howard Harwerth, Sharon Schamberger
Mayor of Selden:
No filing
Selden City Council (5 positions open):

Christopher L. Bainter, Steven Rogers, Jacqueline A. Schulte, Bernard Koerperich, Jacquelyn D. Boultinghouse, Sandra Koerperich.

Pentagon trying to limit soldier deployment lengths

WASHINGTON (AP) — In an action branded a backdoor draft by some critics, the military over the past several years has held tens of thousands of soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines on the job and in war zones beyond their retirement dates or enlistment length.

It is a widely disliked practice that the Pentagon, under new Defense Secretary Robert Gates, is

trying to figure out how to cut back on.

Gates has ordered that the practice — known as “stop loss” — must “be minimized.” At the same time, he is looking for ways to decrease the hardship for troops and their families, recruit more people for a larger military and reassess how the active duty and reserves are used.