



COLBY FREE PRESS



Rep. Jim Morrison

Legislators note session's progress

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer (R-Grinnell) gave an update on the current legislative session Saturday at the Colby Quality Inn.

Among the issues he talked about were school funding, education and more.

"School funding is over with," he said.

The funding is set for two years, but Ostmeyer said it is still a concern. The state is spending money ahead and not paying off any debt he said.

Property taxes are up, and sales taxes revenue are not up since the first of the year. Ostmeyer said January snow storms probably kept people from getting out.

Money for building maintenance at college campuses was another issue. Ostmeyer said the schools have received some money for their

buildings but haven't accounted for what has been spent.

He also talked about the state lottery. It was renewed and does not have a set date for ending.

While the lottery is popular, he does not think the state should be involved in gambling.

Another issue affecting the area is the consolidation of the Gove County Farm Service Agency. It will be combined with the Logan County FSA office.

Ostmeyer himself is affected by the closing. He has a farm operation and said he will probably go to the Sheridan County FSA. The county has a small population but the FSA office served about 1,500 producers and landowners.

"Everybody's concerned about it," he said.

Rep. Jim Morrison of Colby was also there.

Morrison talked about some of the issues he is working on.

One is the repeal of the franchise

“

I just want one letter on why people don't like the doctor.”

Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, on the Dr. Hildyard situation

tax, based on taxing assets.

"It's now being repealed," he said.

The franchise tax predated income tax in Kansas, and will be phased out over the next three years. It has totaled about \$40 million in income each year for the state.

Another law was the Alexis law, which passed in the house. The law defines a fetus as a human being and would make a violent crime such as murder count for murdering two people instead of just one.

Morrison is also part of a committee that investigates issues instead of hearing bills. It has subpoena authority and can also close its

meetings.

He said its purpose is to make government more efficient and accountable.

Health care was also discussed. Ostmeyer was asked about the situation with Colby's Dr. Victor Hildyard and the State Board of Healing Arts.

Ostmeyer said he does not know how it will turn out, and told people to keep writing the board.

He receives letters each week about people supporting Hildyard.

"I haven't gotten any 'Hildyard has to go' letters," Ostmeyer said. "I just want one letter on why people don't like the doctor."



Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer

‘It was a blessing no one was there’

Portion of Heartland Christian School roof collapses

By John Van Nostrand

Colby Free Press Publisher

A portion of Heartland Christian School's roof collapsed Saturday night because of the weight and aftermath of this winter's heavy snowfall. There were no injuries.

The damaged roof was over the school's storage building adjacent to the classroom building. Damage is not expected to disrupt daily classroom activities.

School administrator Jesse Vincent said after the New Year's Day weekend snowstorm, school staff and board members had been on the roof several times clearing snow.

"We had seen some cracks and breaks in the roof," Vincent said.

Those people had been at the school at 1995 W. Fourth St. earlier in the day assessing the damage already created. Those people were trying to find ways to temporarily brace the roof and limit the spread of the cracks.

"It was a blessing no one was there when it actually happened," he said. "It would have been a bad deal."

Vincent said many of those people went to the school's fundraiser dinner during Colby Community College's basketball games Saturday at the Colby Community College to further discuss the roof. Vincent said that may have been when the roof fell in.

Vincent said the roof over the classrooms is older than the roof that was damaged.

"All the studs and I-beams just twisted," he said.

Vincent said it was too early to tell how much damage the materials inside received.



JOHN VAN NOSTRAND/Colby Free Press

A portion of Heartland Christian School's roof collapsed Saturday evening. School administration said the accumulation of snow and ice since the late December snows caused the damage. Since the snows, school staff has cleared the snow off the roof multiple times.

School staff noticed within the school how the roof had been damaged by the weight of the snow. Attempts were made to temporarily support the roof. The damage is not expected to disrupt classes.

Group aims to expand Amtrak service in Kansas

WICHITA — A group wants to bring Amtrak back to the state's largest city, which hasn't had passenger service since 1979.

The Northern Flyer Alliance wants to speed up expansion of the Heartland Flyer route north from Oklahoma City to Wichita, Newton and Kansas City, Mo.

"I haven't found one person yet who says that's a crazy idea," said Autumn Heithaus, the alliance's executive director.

Anyone wanting to catch an Amtrak train from the Wichita area must drive 20 miles north to Newton, and there is no service running south.

That doesn't sit well with 81-year-old Rosemary Terry, a mem-

ber of the newly formed Northern Flyer Alliance. She would like to visit her daughter in Fort Worth, Texas, which is served by the Heartland Flyer route.

"I know a lot of people, if they could get on a train and not worry about getting hit by a truck on a highway, they could go somewhere," she said.

The alliance has started a letter-writing campaign to Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, hoping to enlist her in the push for returning rail service to Wichita.

"A city of this size that doesn't have any rail, any other way to get out but an airplane, is absolutely ridiculous," Terry said.

Lloyd Stagner, an alliance mem-

ber from Newton, is a former railroad employee and the author of several books about trains. Rail travel, he said, is a logical response to fluctuating gasoline costs and airline security issues.

"I think passenger rail has a big future. With the city of Wichita giving subsidies to airlines, I think Amtrak would be in line, too," Stagner said.

Wichita's Union Station has been converted into an office building where Cox Communications maintains its state headquarters. But Cox is moving to another location, with the move to be completed in 2008.

After that, Cox's real estate firm will put the station on the market,

said Jay Allbaugh, the company's vice president for government and public affairs.

The expansion move is also getting support from Evan Stair of Norman, Okla., director of the Amtrak Extension Coalition.

"This train should've operated through Wichita from day one," he said.

Oklahoma transportation officials, too, would like to see the route extended into Kansas.

"It only stands to reason if it were connected to the north, the ridership would obviously be enhanced," said Joe Kyle, manager of the rail programs division for the Oklahoma Department of Transportation.

Texas and Oklahoma split the annual cost, approximately \$4 million, of running the Heartland Flyer.

Kansas would have to provide state funds for any expansion to occur, Amtrak spokesman Marc Magliari said, and the initiative would have to come from the transportation departments of Kansas and Oklahoma.

But John Maddox, rail affairs program manager for the Kansas Department of Transportation, said the department has no state money available for capital improvements to rail service.

Kansas law also prohibits the use of state money to pay for passenger rail operations, Maddox said.

Sheridan County leader resigns

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

Residents of Sheridan County's Commission District No. 3 will not have a commissioner as of March 1.

David Zimmerman, a Republican, resigned this morning to move to Kinsley where he has accepted the manager's position of ADM Grain. Kinsley is located east of Dodge City in Edwards County.

"Doren (Follis) can get started on the process," Zimmerman said.

Follis is the chairman of the Republican Party and has 21 days to organize a convention of committee people who will appoint Zimmerman's replacement.

The process will mirror the one used in November when the party convened to replace the late Jim Johnson, Sheridan County sheriff killed in the line of duty in October.

For the past several weeks, speculation about Zimmerman's resignation has loomed over the heads of his constituents in Prairie Dog, Sheridan, Bloomfield, Logan and Solomon townships.

Accompanied to the meeting by his wife, Maria, Zimmerman said the past two years of his four-year term have been "positive and rewarding."

"This was Zimmerman's first term.

Commissioner Ron Schamberger wished the Zimmerman's best wishes in the move.

"I wish you all the best," Schamberger said. "You've been a good commissioner. Stop by anytime."

Sheridan County Clerk Paula Bielser asked Maria Zimmerman how long she had to complete her nursing degree at Colby Community College before moving to Kinsley.

"Seventeen days," Maria Zimmerman said.

The couple has six children, the youngest of which are, Caroline, a senior at Hoxie High School who graduates in May, and Jake, an eighth grader who will accompany his father to Kinsley.

Follis met briefly with Zimmerman and Schamberger after the commission meeting to talk about the process of an appointment. The third commissioner in Sheridan County is Keith Kennedy, but was absent from the meeting.

Bielser said depending on precinct committee members' schedules, the party will meet on March 12 or 13 to vote on Zimmerman's replacement.