



Legislators ready to face budget crisis

By Kevin Bottrell
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The Kansas Legislature is set to begin tackling the state’s continuing budget crisis Monday afternoon, when the Senate and House of Representatives gavel into session at 2 p.m.

The opening ceremony will begin a 90-day general session that will last until May.

Sen. Ralph Ostmeier, who represents Thomas County as well as 17 other northwest counties, said the most important issue will be the budget.

“We need to get the positive numbers back,” he said. “We’re

on a negative note right now.”

Tax revenue estimates began dropping in 2008, prompting the Legislature and Gov. Mark Parkinson to make millions of dollars in budget cuts. Ostmeier said he has heard rumors the Senate might propose a tax increase. He said it was more likely to go with that idea than the House, since no senators are up for re-election this year.

“The House is also way more conservative,” he added.

The Legislature, he said, will probably consider more budget cuts, even though Parkinson has announced he would favor a tax hike over cuts.

Tied to the budget are the cuts

to education, with a lawsuit threatened by Schools for Fair Funding, an alliance of school districts that sued the state earlier in the decade and forced a \$1 billion hike in state aid. This week, the association decided to try reopening the 2006 “Montoy” Supreme Court case that forced the Legislature to spend more on schools.

“I don’t think they’re going to reopen it, so they’ll open a new suit,” Ostmeier said.

Ostmeier said he opposed the Montoy increase at the time because it was ordered by the court and did not come from elected officials. Schools had several years

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School group wants lawsuit opened again

TOPEKA (AP) — A legal dispute over money for Kansas public schools is heading back to court, with an alliance of school districts challenging recent cuts in education spending by the state.

John Robb, an attorney for Schools for Fair Funding, told the *Hutchinson News* on Wednesday that he would file a request within 10 days for the Kansas Supreme Court to reopen a lawsuit over the funding of public school districts. The court ruled in 2006 that the state’s system for funding schools was unconstitutional and inadequate.

The decision to seek judicial review comes after the Wichita School Board voted Monday to support a renewed lawsuit. The decision raised the number of

school districts supporting the case to 55, representing more than 141,000 Kansas students. Additional districts are considering joining the effort.

Messages left for Robb weren’t immediately returned Thursday.

The budget for Kansas school districts has been reduced over the past year as the state struggled with declining revenues caused by the lingering recession. Gov. Mark Parkinson and the Kansas Legislature have cut total state aid to 2006 levels.

Robb and the school districts maintain that those reductions fly in the face of the Supreme Court’s

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Colby woman earns TV spot through greeting-card collection

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If a person would have begun collecting greeting cards from well wishers for a single occasion from 1946 to 2008, how many cards would that be? The answer is, “a lot!”

For Ruth Lowenthal, former Colby Community College librarian, it is enough to fill a scrapbook so full it’s more than eight inches thick, plus many “loose” cards not yet destined for confinement between the covers.

It all started Aug. 1, 1946, when Ruth Hueftle, a young librarian at Fort Hays State College, married Al Lowenthal, a soldier from Connecticut who was stationed at Walker Air Force Base just east of Hays.

“I saved the wedding congratulatory cards then,” she said, “and each succeeding year when anniversary cards came in the mail, I saved them, too.”

She said that after 25 years, she transferred her growing collection of cards to a leather-bound scrap book. As more cards came in, she added more pages until the book grew to be eight inches thick with all the 50th anniversary cards.



COLBY COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Ruth Lowenthal, known here known for her 22 years as Colby Community College librarian from 1966 to 1988, will be featured on the Hallmark Cards 100th anniversary “Memory Moments” advertising this year with her collection of greeting cards dating from 1946.

“It was nearly too heavy to lift, and so full, it was impossible to add more,” Lowenthal said.

The next 11 years of cards, although saved, have remained

loose awaiting for a decision of where they should go.

Lowenthal said that after her

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Briefly

Hospital offers cut-rate tests

The Citizens Medical Center Laboratory, the Thomas County Wellness Committee and Thomas County Extension are offering blood draws for discounted lab tests from 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. Tuesday through Saturday next week at the Citizens Medical Center Specialty Clinic. Tests will include comprehensive metabolic profile, thyroid stimulating hormone, prostate specific antigen and hemoglobin. Participants should fast for 10-12 hours. Results will be available at 5:30 and 7 p.m. Monday, Jan. 25. For information, call Jeanene Brown at 460-4850 or Diann Gerstner at 460-4582.

St. Jude’s needs used cards

Don’t throw your used Christmas cards away. The Colby Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary has a drop-off box at the Pioneer Memorial Library for

them. Cards will go to kids at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital in Memphis for projects. For information, call Hazel Duffey at 462-3476.

Knights to hold sports contest

The Colby Knights of Columbus will hold their annual Free Throw Contest at 1 p.m. Sunday at the Colby Elementary School gym. The contest is open to all boys and girls ages 10 to 14 as of Jan. 1. Proof of age, such as a copy of a birth certificate, is required. Doors will open at noon. For information, call 443-1548 or 460-2924.

Seniors plan potluck Tuesday

The group More Fun Together plans a potluck dinner for people 50 or older who are alone, widowed, divorced, separated or who have partners in nursing homes at 6 p.m. Tuesday at the First Presbyterian

Church. Bring a dish to share. Table service and beverage will be provided. For information, call the church at 462-6342.

Conservation meeting Jan. 25

The annual meeting of the Thomas County Conservation District will be at 6:30 p.m. Monday, Jan. 25, at the Colby United Methodist Church. Make reservations by next Friday, with district manager Debbie Potter at 462-7482, extension 303.

Hearing set on emergency plan

Thomas County Emergency Management and E-Fm Consulting will hold the final public meeting for the Thomas County Hazard Mitigation Plan at 6 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 21, at the Thomas County Office Complex. The plan, being developed by the county and its cities, aims to help reduce the damage done

by disasters. A public comment period will run from Jan. 21 to Feb. 4, after which the plan will be set. Drafts of the plan can be viewed at the emergency management office or the Pioneer Memorial Library. For information, call Director Susan McMahan at 460-4516.

For latest flu info, call 460-4599

A hot line for questions on seasonal influenza and the H1N1 flu strain will be available throughout the flu season at (785) 460-4599. The Thomas County Health Department posts information about the status and availability of vaccines, priority groups and the like.



KATHRYN BALLARD/Colby Free Press
Kindergartner Parker Todd had to dress warmly as his dad, Steve Todd, walked him to Colby Grade School this morning. The National Weather Service reported temperatures of minus 4 degrees and wind chill at minus 13 degrees this morning. Area schools delayed their start times by two hours both Thursday and today.

Area kids bundle up for two-hour late school

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Stiff winds that dropped the wind chill factor as low as minus 22 degrees prompted school officials to start classes two hours later than usual at all county schools the last two days.

Colby Superintendent Terrell Harrison said she looks at a lot of factors before making a decision, but the wind was the big issue this week.

“It’s the wind chill that’s the biggest factor these past couple days,” she said.

The National Weather Service recorded a north wind up to 26 mph Wednesday and Thursday, with gusts up to 33 mph. Temperatures ranged down to a low of -6 this morning, with the high Thursday only about 10. By noon today, however, the mercury was up to a balmy 19 and the wind had turned to the south at only about 6 mph.

The service expected temperatures to climb into the 40s by Sunday and stay there, maybe even touching the 50s by midweek. Only sunny days were predicted as the thaw chases the arctic high.

Other factors to consider when calling off school or delaying the start might be ice on the roads, snow depth or visibility.

Harrison said whenever there is severe weather, she confers with all the surrounding schools, including Brewster, Golden Plains, Atwood, Oakley and Winona. The superintendents come to a decision together whether to cancel school or just delay the start time. They often have conference calls with the National Weather Service office in Goodland, she said.

Harrison said she also consults with Bus Director Alan Wade to see if he feels that conditions on the bus routes are good enough to get all the kids picked up and to the schools.

The superintendents each make their own decisions though, she said, because conditions can differ between the towns. In the last snowstorm, Har-



KATHRYN BALLARD/Colby Free Press
Especially the crossing guards had to dress warmly this morning to help get students from their parents’ cars to the building.

ison said, conditions were much worse to the east of Colby. The Oakley School District had several days off while Colby only had one.

Harrison said she that when the weather is bad, she and the other superintendents also look at what athletic events and activities are going on. On Thursday, she and Oberlin Superintendent Duane Dorshorst decided to move the start time a the wrestling meet earlier in the afternoon.

When school is cancelled or delayed, Harrison said, word goes out through the K-12 Alert, which sends an automated message to parents’ cell phones, home phones or e-mail addresses. Harrison said the district also gets the information to area radio and television stations and posts it to a ticker on the district’s home page.

