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COLBY FREE PRESS

75¢

Monday

April 11, 2011
Volume 122, Number 57
Serving Thomas County since 1888

Governor signs tax-incentive law here

By Kevin Bottrell

Colby Free Press
kbottrell@nwkans.com

Gov. Sam Brownback stopped at the Colby Municipal Airport this morning to sign a bill creating incentives for people to move to 50 Kansas counties, including Thomas, that have been bleeding population over the last decade or more.

About 75 people turned out for the ceremony, the second of four the governor planned across the state. The first was in Belleville, with others planned at Yates Center and Wichita State University.

Brownback was accompanied by his secretaries of commerce, labor and revenue. Officials from Colby attended the event along with representatives from Thomas, Decatur, Sherman, Rawlins and Trego counties, as well as board members from Colby Community College and administrators from the Northwest Kansas Technical College.

Three of the area's state legislators, Reps. Rick Billinger of Goodland and Don Hineman of Dighton, and Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer of Grinnell, all turned out.

The law provides a five-year state income tax exemption to anyone who moves to one of the rural counties. Former Kansans must have lived outside the state for five years. A person has to live in the county for the entire tax year, starting in 2012, file their taxes on time and sign an affidavit confirming their residency.

Counties that sign on can participate in a state matching program to help pay down student loans up to \$15,000. Brownback said this covers anyone who moves to one of the "rural opportunity zone" counties, including those who move from inside Kansas.

Brownback said small towns like Colby have good quality of life and great community. The bill is designed to be a recruiting tool to combat the population decline, he said.

Concentration of the rural economy in agriculture and young people moving away were some of the primary culprits, he said.

"Well, I'm the governor and I'm not going to stand around," he said. "We need to turn that trend around, and I think we can do it."

Brownback himself originated



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Gov. Sam Brownback (above, from left) spoke with Reps. Rick Billinger and Don Hineman after signing a bill aimed at increasing rural population into law today at Colby Municipal Airport. Brownback had with him a map (right) highlighting all the counties that have been included in the tax incentive program.

the bill. He said the idea came out of a campaign stop in Winfield while he was running for office.

"There were about six people there, and four were from southern California," he said.

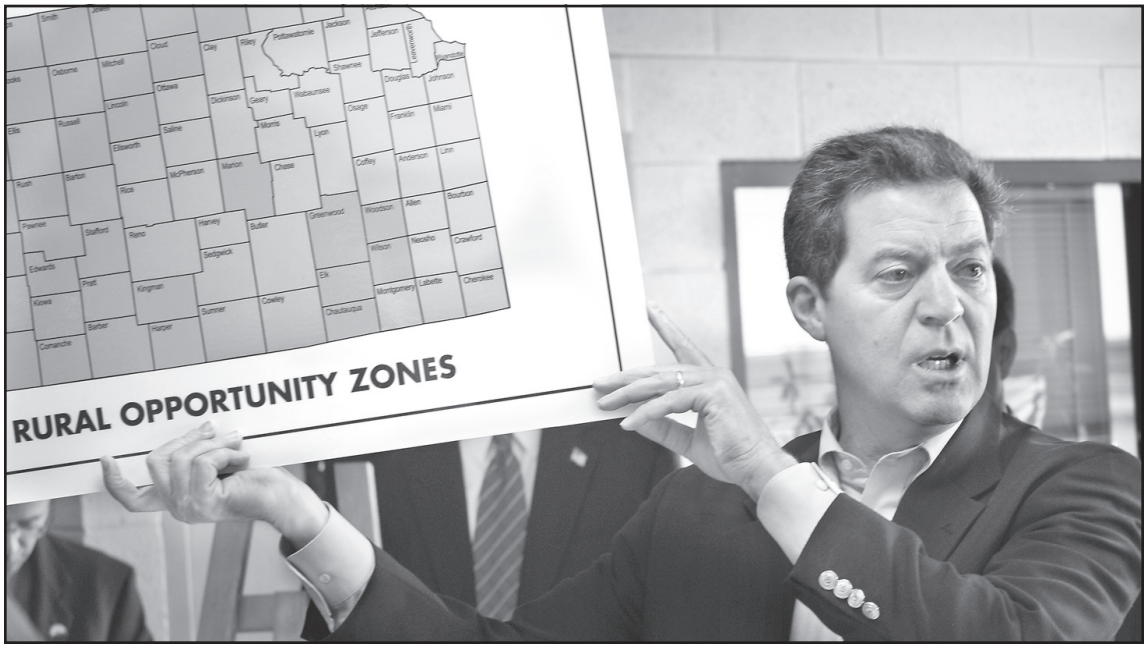
He said he asked the Californians why they had moved to Kansas, and they told him that while on a motorcycle trip through the area, they decided they liked that town and wanted to retire there.

"If this can happen in Winfield, why couldn't it happen everywhere?" he asked. "We gotta do more; we gotta attract people."

Brownback said the state hasn't done enough to sell itself in the past, and now has to be aggressive. The state has to create opportunities and make it easy for people to move here.

Brownback showed off a chart that highlighted the counties included in the zone. I covers most of the western half of the state, excluding Ellis and Barton counties (Hays and Great Bend), and eight counties from Ford to Stevens, including Garden City, Dodge City

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Hake confirmed as Ward II councilman

By Kevin Bottrell

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kbottrell@nwkans.com

With the voting tallies now final, Mike Hake held on to a two-vote lead and will be the new Colby city councilman from Ward II.

Thomas County commissioners confirmed the vote at their meeting Friday morning and opened the 26 provisional ballots not counted in Tuesday's preliminary results.

County Clerk Shelly Harms said provisional ballots are given to people whose status does not match their voter registration. This includes those who move into the county or move within the county and don't re-register with the clerk's office before the registration rolls are closed. Anyone who has a name change, such as from a maiden to a married name, also gets a provisional ballot

of they don't re-register, she said.

"There is a whole slew of reasons why someone might be given a provisional ballot," she said, "but those are the main ones we deal with."

The Ward II council race was the only one close enough to be affected by the provisional ballots – with a margin of just two votes in favor of Hake. However, only two of those ballots were from voters inside the ward. The two ballots were split between Hake and Josh Faber, making the final total 133 to 131 with two write ins.

In Ward III, Stand Schmidt received 275 votes while Larry McDonald, who was running as a write-in candidate for Colby Community College Board, received three write-in votes. There were five other write-ins.

In Ward I, incumbent Patrick Mallory received 206 votes with four write ins. In Ward IV, incumbent Fred Taylor received 233 votes

with one write in.

In the Colby mayoral race, victor Gary Adrian picked up 12 more votes for a final total of 541. Competitors Dave Voss and Ed Collins ended up with 464 and 78.

For Colby School Board, incumbent Omar Weber got the most votes with 1,015. Newcomer Angela Gaede was next with 841, then Ed Geihlsler with 838 and Brice Barton with 830. McDonald got 18 write-in votes for school board and there were 23 other write ins.

For the three seats on the college board, incumbent Arlen Leiker received the most votes with 928. Incumbent Dale Herschberger came in second with 906 and Nick Wells, a long-time teacher at the college and now director of its foundation, got the third seat with 783. Susan McMahan got 574 votes; Di-

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Controlled burn escapes farm hands, consumes 800 acres

A fire along K-27 near the Wallace/Greeley County line about 12:30 p.m. Saturday that apparently started when a controlled burn escaped a nearby irrigated field took two houses along with a hay barn, two pits of silage and a canary yellow pickup at a dairy.

Julie Samuelson, editor and publisher of *The Western Times* in Sharon Springs, said nearly 800 acres burned. The blaze was blamed for an accident when two Greeley County fire rigs collided. A fireman was taken to the hospital after the wreck, she said.

Sparks from the dairy fire blew at least two miles north into Wallace County, where they set a Conservation Reserve field on fire. That blaze burned at least 600 acres of grass, corn stalks and pasture.

The full extent of the damage wasn't known yet. While several residents were warned to be ready to flee, Samuelson said, no other homes were damaged and no injuries were reported. No livestock was lost.

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Briefly

Come on out for Baptist revival

The Colby Independent Baptist Church plans revival services at 7 p.m. tonight through Wednesday at the church. Evangelist David Sommerford, a Marine Corps veteran, planned to bring his decorated sports car with him. For information, call Pastor Bernard Heinz at 460-0313.

City crew plans to fill cracks

The city street crew will continue filling cracks Tuesday and Wednesday, weather permitting. Public Works Director Chris Bieker asks that people move vehicles off these streets – Ninth Street from Thompson Avenue to Lane Drive, 10th Street from Thompson Drive to Country Club Drive, Lynn Avenue from Ninth Street to Lue Drive and Thompson Avenue from Brookside to Ninth Street – until the work is done. For information, call the Public Works office at (785) 460-4420.

Kindergarten screening Tuesday

Colby Grade School and the Northwest Kansas Education Service Center will have kindergarten screenings from 8 a.m. to noon Tuesday at the Colby United Methodist Church. The screenings test children's readiness for school. To make an appointment, call school nurse Amy Hutfles at 460-5111.

Senior dinner, dance coming up

The Retired and Senior Volunteer Program will hold its annual banquet and dance at 4:45 p.m. Wednesday, April 20, at the City Limits Convention Center. Doors open at 4 p.m., with the dance from 7 to 9 p.m. Make reservations to the office at 462-6744 by Tuesday.

Treasurer's office to close

The Thomas County Treasurer's office will close Tuesday and Wednesday so the staff can do motor

vehicle training. The office will also close from noon to 1 p.m. Thursday and Friday. For information, call the treasurer at 460-4520.

Churches offer Lenten series

Soup and Scripture, sponsored by the Thomas County Ministerial Alliance, starts at noon each Wednesday through Easter at Smoffee's in downtown Colby. Speaker for this week on "Who is This Jesus?" will be Tim Griffiths, director of the Shepherd's Staff in Rexford. Cost for lunch is \$5. For information, call Jarrod Spencer at (785) 443-2403 or your pastor.

Students to serve Italian food

The Colby High School forensics and debate teams will offer an Italian-theme dinner theater at 6 p.m. Thursday in the high school commons. After the meal, top forensics competitors will perform. Dona-

tions will be taken for team expenses. For information, call coach Nancy Rundel at 460-5300.

Girl Scouts collecting old flags

The Colby Girl Scouts will have a collection box in the lobby of the Pioneer Memorial Library through Saturday for their annual flag disposal drive. They remind everyone that U.S. flags should be properly disposed of if they're dirty, no longer rectangular, faded or in general disrepair. For information, call Katherine Kersenbrock-Ostmeyer at (785) 443-2479.



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