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KAYLA CORNETT/Colby Free Press
Ron Conway of Garden City made a comment about river flows and ground water rights at the Ogallala Aquifer Summit on Thursday in the Cultural Arts Center at Colby Community College.

Kansans speak on aquifer's future

By Kayla Cornett
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The audience at Colby Community College stood on their feet as Gov. Sam Brownback was introduced at the Ogallala Aquifer Summit on Thursday.

People from all across Kansas came to voice their opinions on the issues confronting the aquifer, including a panel of municipal representatives, farmers, bankers and other groups affected by the aquifer issues.

"The planning process, which brings people together to talk about what we need to do, is critical," Gov. Brownback said, "and it needs to come from the people that have the water resource, and that's the Ogallala region in this particular case and that's folks here.

"What we have got to do is get in the position to continue this great agriculture economy in this region, to grow it, and to conserve and extend that aquifer. This is what we want to get done, this is what we need to get done for our future. The ideas, the push for it, the support for it has to come from the Ogallala region."

Brownback also said the first thing the state needs to do is repeal the "Use It or Lose It" doctrine and water law, and look at how micro-specific the aquifer is.

For the summit, three men were tasked to frame the issues surrounding aquifer and offer solutions. They presented their findings to the panel and audi-



ROBERT HANZLICK
Gov. Sam Brownback chatted with Colby Mayor Gary Adrian outside the Frahm Theater at Colby Community College.

ence, as well as to those watching the online stream of the summit.

Brownie Wilson, a water information resource manager with the Kansas Geological Survey at the University of Kansas, talked about the current and projected conditions of the aquifer, showing maps and figures on power-point slides. His maps detailed the precipitation in Kansas, the average reported use made of water in Kansas, and the source of water, whether it's ground or surface water. The reported use showed that water is mainly used for irrigation, and both ground and surface water are nearly equal sources.

He also discussed the Index Well Program, which monitors the current water level of the about 1,400 wells in the aquifer. The program found average water levels of 100 feet. He said

there have been significant drops in the water level from 1996 to 2011, and after estimating a number of factors including density distribution and saturated thickness, he created a projection of the estimated usable lifetime of the aquifer, about 10 years.

Dr. Bill Golden from Kansas State University spoke about groundwater policy.

"If we want to extend the life of the aquifer, some kind of restriction is going to have to take place," Golden said.

He suggested that the restriction should involve reducing water use per acre rather than reducing water per irrigated acre. He went on to discuss the policy implications and the barriers to adoption of limited irrigation, but concluded that irrigated crop revenue will bounce back if the reduction is long term rather than

short term. Overall, he claimed that reducing water use per acre for a long period of time would maximize profits.

The last to present was Dr. Joseph Aistrup, also from Kansas State University. He talked about the Ogallala as a common-pool resource, and discussed the characteristics of this type of resource. The main problem is that actions of a single user doesn't have an perceptible impact on the long-term viability of the aquifer. Even though someone could turn off his irrigation system, he said, other users' wells subtract from the water resources available to all. In turn, that creates individual incentives for over-use of the resource.

He concluded his presentation by saying the Use It or Lose It law leads to problems, and the only way to address the sustainability of a common-pool resource, such as the Ogallala, is by collective action. That means there needs to be a strong network among water users; collective solutions need to come from the users as a group; local institutions should implement the solutions; and users should be accountable to each other.

"All of you working together will have a big impact on changing that future," Aistrup said. "It is your choice."

The next part of the summit gave Brownback a chance to hear the comments and questions from people in the audience.

One comment came from Bob Hower, a retired public official of

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Colby College may increase property taxes

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Alan Waites, vice president of business affairs at Colby Community College, summarized the current budget situation compared to last year for the college board at Monday's meeting in Thomas Hall.

On the revenue side, Waites said this year state funding has stayed virtually the same and the state operating grant has stayed about the same as well.

The budget is based on 31,400 credit hours and 225 resident students, he said, and the college is not anticipating an increase in either of these figures. Waites also said that the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding has ended; it was only given to the college for three years. The act provided \$180,000 each year, so the college will now be missing that money.

The primary risks this year are enrollment levels and student retention, which means keeping students from transferring to another college.

On the expenditure side, the college not budgeting an annual

pay increase for the third straight year.

The total expenditure budget is at \$12.6 million, but the cash flow is "beyond critical" Waites said, but he said this has been expected for quite some time. Waites said there are two things that the college really needs to look at to help the cash flow situation. The first is asking for another property tax increase by six mills "simply for survival." It will take care of what the college need immediately, he said, since they are close to only a \$3 million cash reserve balance. Second, the college still needs to consider alternate financing, such as sale and leaseback, where the college would sell property to a buyer, and then the buyer would immediately lease back that property to the college.

"We might still be able to do something there, but we need to have John (Gatz) do some research," Waites said.

Waites then discussed issuing no-fund warrants as another option. No-fund warrants are short-term borrowings that are approved by the state first, after which the college solicits them to different

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County ends janitor contract

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The Thomas County commissioners terminated the county's janitorial contract at their regular meeting Monday morning.

Patricia Langley was hired two years ago to maintain lawns, remove snow and provide cleaning services for the Thomas County Office Complex on South Range, the sheriff's department and the county courthouse.

Numerous complaints and discrepancies, including the presence of unknown subcontractors on the premises and a possible breach of contract have been raised at several commissioner meetings.

Department heads were given the opportunity in June to revoke keys from Langley and clean their own offices. Some, such as the county clerk's office, took advantage of that offer and have been cleaning their offices for several months.

The Thomas County Community Foundation had also asked

that Langley not be granted access to their office shortly after her hire in 2009.

A certified letter was issued on Monday, giving Langley proper notice. Her contract will end on Thursday, Aug. 18.

Commissioner Ken Christiansen voiced his concern that Langley might not fulfill her duties until the end of her contract and that they may need to find temporary labor in the interim. An advertisement will be placed in the Colby Free Press to promote the available position.

James Foster, a representative from the Kansas Department of Commerce's Office of Rural Opportunity, came to the meeting to discuss the county being included as a Rural Opportunity Zone.

Foster was available to answer questions and confirmed obligations the county would have to fulfill if voting in favor of participating. The county would be bound for a five-year enrollment and the minimum amount to budget is

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Cops, medics and firemen to compete for most blood donations next week

Firefighters, emergency medical technicians and law enforcement will compete to see who can give the most blood next week for the Red Cross Battle of the Badges.

The Red Cross will have a two-day blood drive from noon to 6 p.m. Wednesday and 7:45 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Thursday at the Colby Community Building. During that time, the three teams will try and get the most blood donated.

The public can get in on the action as well by donating and then voting for their favorite team.

The winning team gets to take home a trophy. Call (800) 733-2767 or visit redcrossblood.org to make an appointment. Walk-ins are also welcome. All blood types are needed. A blood donor card, driver's license or two other forms of identification are needed to check in. Donors must be at least 17 and in good health.

State wants to shift money from energy project

TOPEKA (AP) — A state program that loans money to Kansans to upgrade their homes' energy efficiency might lose most of its funding.

The Kansas Energy Office wants to move funding from the Efficiency Kansas program — a pro-

gram involved in the Take Charge Challenge — to three renewable-energy projects. The U.S. Department of Energy must approve the proposal.

Efficiency Kansas used most of the \$38 million the state received in stimulus money to promote energy efficiency projects.

If the department approves, more than \$20 million would

be redirected to three projects — \$5.25 million for an ethanol fueling project in Wichita; \$12 million for a biomethane production facility in Oakley and \$4.5 million for a statewide biobased energy supply project.

The Lawrence Journal-World reports that the Kansas Energy Office is looking for alternative funding for Efficiency Kansas.

Governor flips switch on network

It's not every day a business can get the governor to flip a switch for it, even a ceremonial one.

Gov. Sam Brownback, in town for the Ogallala Aquifer Summit, flipped a ceremonial switch for AT&T on Thursday at one of the company's towers in Colby. The event helped the company announce completion of high-speed broadband network across 43 western Kansas counties, including Thomas County.

"Expansion of high-speed mobile broadband access across the state of Kansas is like building a bridge to the future," Brownback said. "It will encourage investment, it will help create jobs and it will help ensure that Kansas has a competitive business environment that is second to none."

Also on hand was Colby Mayor Gary Adrian, State Sen.



KATHRYN BALLARD/Colby Free Press
Gov. Sam Brownback flipped a ceremonial switch on AT&T's newly-upgraded mobile broadband network.

Ralph Ostmeyer, officials from Kansas President Steve Hahn. surrounding counties and AT&T

