

Weather

Senator talks redistricting, water

Briefly

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in the country or in ag jobs.

When asked about the problems that hogged the Senate in the 2012 term, Ostmeier identified three groups that were unable to work together for consensus. Of the 40 senators, he said, eight were Democrats who voted together, 13 were moderate Republicans who split with Gov. Sam Brownback's administration, and the rest were conservative Republicans.

He said that particular set of conflicts is unlikely to be repeated because many of the moderates were voted out in the primaries. As for actions taken which seem to portend future problems, he said he has learned over the years that "repealing is of value."

An example he offered is a bill passed last year to allow farmers to use a five-year average for their water allotments rather than the earlier "use it or lose it" policy. He said some unforeseen issues have arisen because of vagueness in the law which will have to be addressed.

Other programs need to be developed dealing with water rights, he said. Efforts are underway to start another Local Enhanced Management Area in

the southwest part of the state, he said, adding that he thinks everyone needs to work together to cut water use or it won't work.

"We need to keep the viability of the aquifer for our great-grandchildren, though," he said.

Another area that needs to be revisited, he said, is the tax bill that was passed at the end of an extended veto session which included tax cuts proposed by the governor but not his balancing cuts to tax breaks and deductions.

Schools are another important issue facing the Legislature, Ostmeier said, adding that he sees financial pressures and urbanization again creating pressures for forced consolidation of small school districts.

He said consolidation has already been pushed about as far as it's possible to go - if nothing else because of the amount of time students already have to spend on a bus. He also noted that forced consolidation caused a lot of trouble in the 1960s and people will fight it just as hard now.

He said Kansas spends about \$12,000 a year per student, but in rural districts that amount is up to \$16,000 because of minimal requirements. Those schools face the problem of "too much

property and too few students," but cannot cut back beyond a certain point.

"We can't penalize them because they don't have students," he said. "The school is the economic driver in every community."

"Another thing the Legislature did this past year," he said, "is place an emphasis on tech schools. A lot of kids won't go to college."

He said a shortage of skilled laborers has created a gap which needs to be filled.

It holds an opportunity for those who are having trouble finding work as well, he said, citing a woman he's acquainted with who has bachelor's and master's degrees, but has enrolled in a tech school to learn nursing.

"We're always going to need someone with a wrench or a shovel," he said, regardless of how advanced technology gets.

Ostmeier knows about working with his hands. He grew up as one of nine kids on a dairy farm in southeastern Thomas County. He says one of his priorities is "making sure we bring as many kids back home as we can."

"We are losing a generation of farmers with these high (land

prices," he said. "I want them to have that experience."

Ostmeier says his goal is to represent the district as fully as possible.

"We're losing to the east," he said of the shift in power with redistricting. "I've always worked very hard to build coalitions. With less votes out here, we need to make sure we work together."

He said it's a positive thing that Kansas has a citizen's Legislature. Everybody has a job. When they go back home, they've got a business to run.

If he is re-elected, Ostmeier said, he'd be one of 14 or 16 returning senators and would be in line for a leadership position. He said he would like to serve on the natural resources or budget committee.

"One thing I'll fight as much as I can," he said, "is mandates sent down to the counties. If you're going to do that to us, send the money, too."

The senator said he and his wife Kay have a no-till farm, with about 80 acres under irrigation.

They have seven children and celebrated 50 years of marriage Aug. 4. Their oldest son, Terry, is a partner on the farm, and they have 18 grandchildren.

Blood drive scheduled Thursday and Friday

The American Red Cross plans a blood drive from noon to 6 p.m. Thursday and 7:45 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Friday at the National Guard Armory, 470 S. Range Ave. Walk-ins are welcome. For questions, contact Donor Recruitment Representative Catherine Younger in Hays at (316) 641-1193 or catherine.younger@redcross.org.

Health Department offers walk-in flu clinics

The Thomas County Health Department plans walk-in flu clinics Thursday, next Wednesday and Thursday, Nov. 8, at the department's office at 350 S. Range, and from 11 a.m. to noon on Tuesday, Nov. 6, at the Senior Progress Center. Cost is \$25, or bring a copy of your insurance card. Please remember to complete and print a consent form/voucher from the thomascountyks.com website under the health department tab beforehand. For information, call the department at 460-4596.

Emergency medical class begins in January

Anyone interested in becoming an emergency medical technician should attend a meeting at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 20, at the ambulance barn at 1275 S. Franklin Ave. to learn about a class beginning in January. For questions, call Candy Bryant at Thomas County Emergency Medical Services, (785) 460-4585.

Baptist Church invites everyone to free lunch

Everyone is invited to come and bring a friend to a free meal from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday at the First Baptist Church on the corner of Webster and Grant. For information, call Norma Higerd at 462-7806.

Autumn Art Bazaar downtown Saturday

Colby Community College art students plan an Art Bazaar from 2 to 7 p.m. Saturday in downtown Colby. Fun activities have been planned for the evening, says instructor Rebel Jay. For information, call Jay at 269-7065.

Conservation district has money for projects

The Thomas County Conservation District has state cost-share money available for water-resource projects, including livestock wells, pipelines and tanks, terraces and windbreaks. Sign-up deadline is Tuesday, Nov. 13, and contracts must be completed by May 31. For details, call Manager Debbie Potter at 462-7482.

Presbyterian women selling holiday greenery

The Colby Presbyterian Women are selling fresh Christmas greenery to raise money for mission projects. Orders are due by Sunday; delivery will be the first week of December. For information or to place an order, call the church at 462-6342 or JoAnn Sunderman at 460-2476.

Water hearing could advance new rules

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said, farmers in this area used an average of about 13.7 acre inches per year.

The area being considered is all in Sheridan County except for nine square miles in Thomas County near Menlo. The area ends about six miles west of Hoxie and does not include any towns, Bossert said.

It is one of six "high-priority areas" inside the Groundwater Management District, which covers all or part of 10 northwestern Kansas counties. These areas either saw at least a 9 percent decline in the water table level between 1996 and 2002, or had 275 acre feet of water pumped within a two-mile radius from 1990 to 2000, during studies by the Kansas Geological Survey.

"They see the decline is continuing," Bossert said of the water right owners, "and it's going to get worse, they're near the end."

The district first looked into regulating groundwater use to slow the depletion of the Ogallala Aquifer in 2001. The boundaries of the six high-priority areas were drawn in 2006, and water-right owners met to consider restrictions in 2008 and 2009. Only the "Sheridan 6" area pursued an enhanced management area, Bossert said, holding 13 meetings from 2008 to May 9 of this year to hash out the proposal.

Two other high-priority areas lie in Thomas County, Bossert said. One in the northwest part of the county is just nine square miles, but area of 243 square miles surrounds Colby on three sides and stretches down to the Logan County line.

The creation of Local Enhanced Management Areas was established by Senate Bill 310, which passed the 2012 Legislature. This plan allows groundwater districts to decide what water restriction to impose. Earlier forms of regulation put that power in

the hands of the chief engineer.

"In the end, they just couldn't trust me, I hate to say it," said Barfield, adding that he supports the law.

When the engineer said he could not give the district a guarantee that he would only put in the regulations landowners wanted, he said, he help work on the bill to let them do it on their own.

"It doesn't really guarantee that those locals will get what they want, but it does guarantee that they won't get what they don't want," Bossert said.

Barfield said that he has not received any other proposals for Local Enhanced Management Areas, and he wants to wait to see if the current one is tested by a lawsuit before creating other areas.

Written comments for the hearing should be postmarked on or before Nov. 28, he said. They should be sent to Leslie Garner, 109 SW Ninth St., fourth floor, Topeka.

Democrat says state needs to get budget in line

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burden on them and on community banks. If they prosper, we all win. Then keep investing in quality education, stop this partisan positioning and vote the issues with sound analysis and debate. That is how government works best.

"It doesn't work well when we become a rubber stamp for a party or a governor. (You have

to) challenge each issue to come up with the best solution."

Schmidt said he came to his position as a senator, at the behest of friends, and with the backing of retiring Sen. Janis Lee, whom he ran to replace in 2010.

"After talking with my wife Ellen and some of my close friends," the retired Army man said, "and taking this directly to the Lord in prayer over several weeks, I came to the conclusion

that my service to the country was not over, but was just going to take on another shape.

"So with Sen. Lee's backing, I ran for the position and was elected. I had always been (registered as an) independent while in the Army, so I had to first go to the courthouse and sign up as a Democrat, because that was her party affiliation."

More than anything in his campaign, Schmidt said, he wants to

make sure that rural communities are represented in Topeka.

"With population losses in most of our counties over the last several decades," he said, "it is obvious to me that we must stand together as rural legislators to ensure we are properly represented in our rural communities. We must be aggressive in increasing economic development.

"We must keep our schools

open as long as our local people believe they provide a viable education for our children. That means we must ensure our kids are funded adequately in rural schools.... There are many more things that we need to do, and that means we must stand up and sound off on issues that affect us both directly and indirectly. That takes analysis and willingness to engage at every turn if it is called for."

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