



Area counties meet in Colby

By Heather Alwin

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Officials from 18 northwest Kansas counties heard from state legislators at a regional meeting of the Kansas Association of Counties on Wednesday at Colby Community College.

The meeting drew over 160 county commissioners, treasurers, clerks, appraisers, road supervisors and other county officials. Sheridan County was the host, as the counties take turns putting on this annual event.

State Reps. Ward Cassidy, Sue Boldra and Don Hineman each spoke about issues in the Legislature before taking questions from attendees.

Paul Steele, a Thomas County commissioner, took the opportunity to express his views on guns in public buildings.

"It's not a good idea for people other than public officers to have guns in a public venue," he said. "I think we have a problem when everyone is carrying weapons."

The representatives did not respond.

Tax issues drew several questions. Hineman said the state has a self-imposed shortfall in the budget due to the recent efforts to eliminate the income tax. Legislators will have to cut expenses or find new revenue.

"If we don't pass tax increases, we're left with a big hole," he said, adding that any efforts to undo the tax cuts will be

fought "tooth and nail" by the governor's office.

Cassidy asked the officials to raise their hands if they wanted to see state income taxes eliminated. No hands came up.

All three strongly discouraged their constituents from forwarding canned e-mails.

"We're northwest Kansas," said Cassidy. "We talk to each other."

The representatives said they like to receive e-mails and phone calls from their constituents, though Boldra said she prefers to talk personally on the phone. Cassidy said he is guarded in his e-mail responses because he does not always want his positions publicized, so he encouraged his constituents to call him when they want to discuss controversial topics.



Donita Applebury (top), Thomas County treasurer, received her name tag and schedule at the sign-in table for the Kansas Association of Counties regional meeting Wednesday at Colby Community College. State Rep. Don Hineman (above left) discussed current legislative issues with Bart Briggs, a Gove County commissioner. Hineman, along with Reps. Ward Cassidy (above) and Sue Boldra, attended the meeting to discuss legislative activities and hear from county officials. Bruce Hardesty (right center) and Joanne Long of Computer Information Concepts Inc. talked with Randall Allen of the association staff. The company says it provides the only integrated system in Kansas that allows counties to tie their financial, tax and other programs together.

HEATHER ALWIN/Colby Free Press

Boston area locks down in manhunt

WATERTOWN, Mass. (AP) — The two suspects in the Boston Marathon bombing killed an MIT police officer and hurled explosives at police in a car chase and gun battle overnight that left one of them dead and his brother on the run, authorities said today.

Thousands of officers swarmed the streets in a manhunt that all but paralyzed the Boston area. Buses and subways were not running, and people across the metro area were told to stay inside.

The suspects were identified by law enforcement officials and family members as Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev, ethnic Chechen brothers from Dagestan, which neighbors Chechnya in southern Russia. They lived near Boston and had been in the U.S. for about a decade, an uncle said.

Tamerlan Tsarnaev, a 26-year-old who had been known to the FBI as Suspect No. 1, and was seen in surveillance footage in a black baseball cap, was killed overnight, officials said. His brother, a 19-year-old college student — who was dubbed Suspect No. 2 and was seen wearing

a white, backward baseball cap in the images from Monday's deadly bombing at the marathon finish line — escaped.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the unfolding case.

Authorities in Boston suspended all mass transit and warned close to 1 million people in the entire city and some of its suburbs to stay indoors as the hunt for Suspect No. 2 went on. Businesses were asked not to open. People waiting at bus and subway stops were told to go home.

From Watertown to Cambridge, police SWAT teams, sharpshooters and FBI agents with armored vehicles surrounded buildings as police helicopters buzzed overhead.

"We believe this man to be a terrorist," said Boston Police Commissioner Ed Davis. "We believe this to be a man who's come here to kill people."

In Cambridge, Bryce Acosta, 24, came out of his home with his hands up.

See "BOSTON," Page 2

College finishes program review

By Kayla Cornett

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The Colby Community College trustees got a review Monday of all the programs the college offers, with 100 percent participation from the departments.

Joyce Washburn, dean of academic affairs, presented the overall information from the review, which she said will be done annually from now on. The review covers data from the 2011-12 school year.

She said the college has a three-year schedule for which departments will be reviewed from now on, one-third each year.

Washburn said Dr. Xumei Yang, dean of institutional effectiveness, put together the demographics of each program, including number of students in each course, total graduates from the program that year, number of men and women and average class size.

She said they calculated the

cost/benefit ratio for each program and if the number was less than 1, the program made money. If the number is higher than 1, the program lost money.

Several of the programs, she said, including broadcasting, massage therapy, dental hygiene, farm and ranch and equine, lost money last year.

However, Washburn said, the massage therapy full-time enrollment numbers increased this year, so that program is doing better.

Also, she said, the sustainable energy program, which the college hasn't put a lot of money into, is growing by itself.

One problem they ran across is students not getting their major correct, so they are going to work on that next year.

Dr. Stephen Vacik, college president, said having these numbers will help when it comes to budget time. He said knowing the cost/benefit ratio will help them decide

See "COLLEGE," Page 2

County hears from mental health center

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The director of the High Plains Mental Health Center presented his annual report to the Thomas County commissioners at their meeting Monday, asking them to continue their support of the agency.

Thomas County contributed \$44,293 to the center for 2013, and Director Walt Hill asked that the county budget for the same amount for 2014.

"We appreciate [the county's] commitment to funding," he said.

To determine the amount requested from each county, the center measures a county's population, number of patients served and whether there is a branch office in that county. Counties do not pay on a per-patient basis. For

example, Sherman County used High Plains services more last year than Thomas but contributed less.

High Plains serves 20 northwest Kansas counties as the designated mental health provider, he said. Otherwise, each county could otherwise be required to establish its own mental health department.

The center has provided services for 50 years, he said, and helped roughly 5,200 patients last year.

Though budget cuts over the last several years have reduced the center's staff from 170 to 120, they have placed video teleconferencing equipment in many

See "COUNTY," Page 2

