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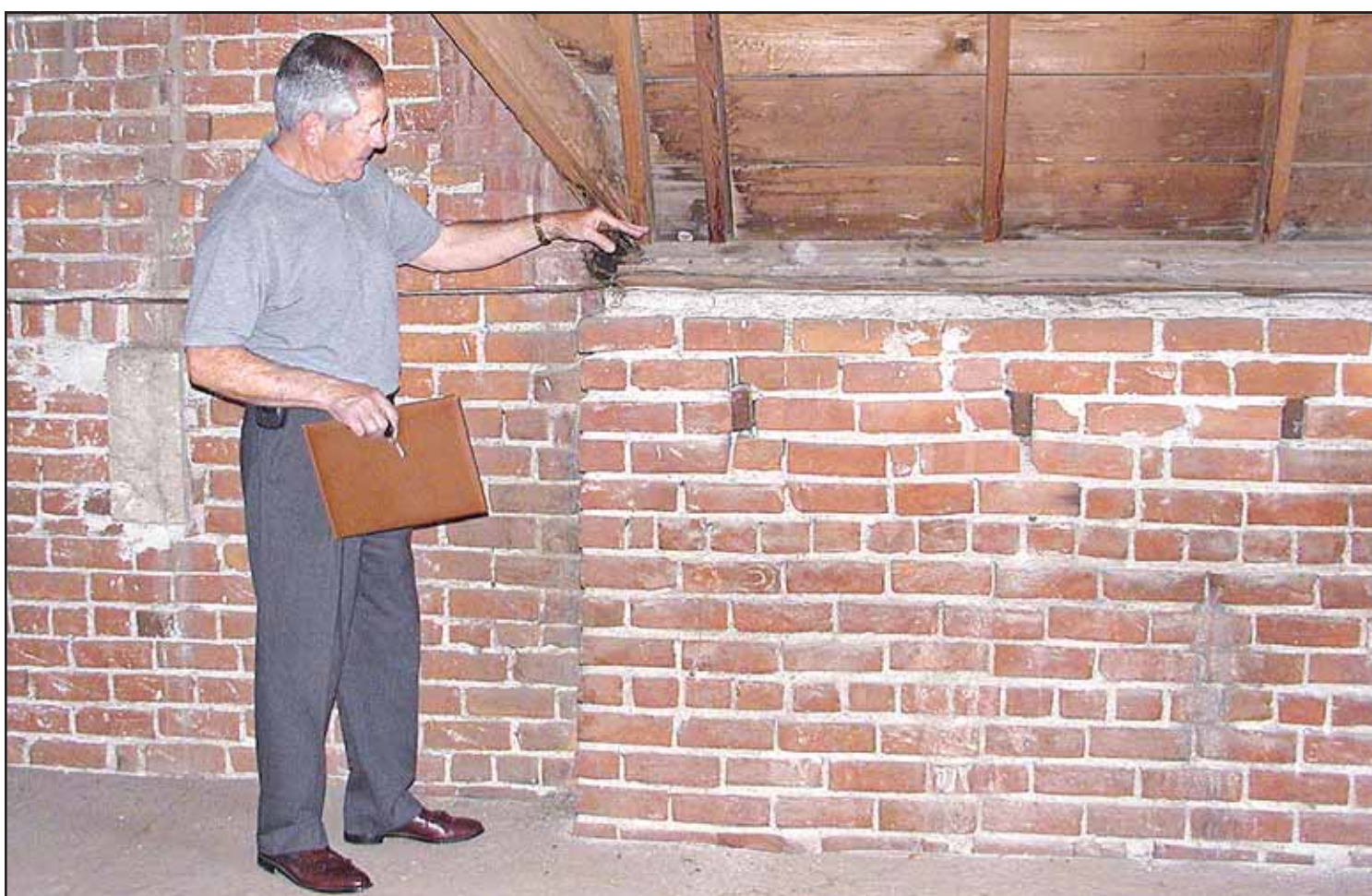
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HEATHER ALWIN/Colby Free Press
Architect Glen Strait (above left) showed Commissioner Paul Steele the border between the masonry walls and limestone foundation in the basement of the Thomas County Courthouse. The foundation appears to be shifting, according to Strait, causing cracks visible in the attic's masonry (above right) which is also weak in spots because of age.



From cellar to tower, courthouse shows age

By Heather Alwin
Colby Free Press
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A half dozen members of the public and local government officials gathered Wednesday afternoon for a tour of the Thomas County courthouse's attic and lower floor, led by Colby architect Glen Strait.

Strait pointing out signs of potential structural issues, saying he did not know the extent of the damage or how much it would cost to fix the building.

Tyson McGreer, Colby city manager,

asked Strait how much it would cost to have an independent structural engineering firm analyze the courthouse.

"The public is going to ask that question," McGreer added.

Strait agreed it was a legitimate question, but had no answers.

The historic courthouse's stability has become a topic since Strait's plan for a new county jail, law enforcement center and office building was unveiled at meetings of the Thomas County commissioners.

During the tour, McGreer commented that Strait should look at the Colby City building,

too, since he thought it was built in the 1920s and could have structural and wiring issues.

"We could enlarge this (the current plan) to have a joint building like they do in Saline County," said County Commission Chairman Paul Steele.

Strait first took the group to the attic, where he identified potential problems with loose mortar in the brick structure. Strait said he guessed the mortar was lime mortar, an older type not quite as strong as the Portland cement frequently used in modern structural

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SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press
Road crews from McCormick Excavation and Paving started milling off the asphalt in the middle of Fourth Street Tuesday morning (below), and finished laying down new asphalt in the middle of the street that afternoon, starting on the north lanes Wednesday. By Thursday morning, they had moved onto east Fourth, out to the city limits (above), and they plan to finish work on south Range, the last part of their project, next week.

Fourth Street gets a new top finish

Construction crews are putting new asphalt on Fourth Street between Range and the east city limits as part of a state-sponsored repaving project.

Traffic was diverted to the outer lanes on Fourth as the work started Tuesday morning and workers from McCormick Excavation and Paving milled off about the top three inches of blacktop on a strip down the middle of the road and laying down new asphalt.

Public Works Director Omar Weber said the project is one of three scheduled in town in the coming weeks as part of the City Connecting Link program to improve parts of state highways that pass through cities.

The Kansas Department of Transportation is helping sponsor the repaving on Fourth from Range to the east city limits, and Range from the north side of the Interstate 70 interchange to the south city limits. The work covers the asphalt parts of those roads, which includes Fourth from Range to School, and Franklin to the east city limits.

The crews finished up their work in the middle lanes of Fourth near Range Tuesday, finished the rest of that part of



Range Wednesday, and afternoon they were moved on to Fourth near Franklin east to the city limits, work that was resumed Thursday and today. Weber said the work will be finished by the end of next week.

Income guidelines rise for commodities

The Thomas County Retired Senior Volunteer Program will be giving out U.S. Department of Agriculture commodities from 1 to 2 p.m. Monday at the office in the Senior Progress Center, using new income guidelines set this spring.

Laura Withington, the director for the program, said 40 to 50 families, averaging three people each, usually show up for commodity distributions, but she does not usually see the same faces.

"It changes a lot," Withington said. "You know, we get a lot of the people who come and go."

As of April, she said, income guidelines have been increased by the state Department for Children and Families. The maximum gross income for a single person is \$1,245 per month, Withington said, up from \$1,211. For two, it's \$1,681, and for each additional family member, add \$436. The increase is about 2.9 percent.

Volunteers come here from other towns

in Thomas County, including Brewster, and from Logan, Rawlins, Sheridan and Wallace counties to take food back to people who need it. Withington said Rasure Lumber usually sends a forklift to unload the food.

She said program expects almost 40 cases of canned goods, 24 cans each. They will probably include canned and nonperishable goods, including macaroni, orange juice, peanut butter, peaches, cereal, mixed fruit, cranberry sauce and kidney and northern beans.

The food will be distributed first come, first served to eligible families, she said. People are asked to not arrive at the distribution site before 12:30 p.m., she added, but the distribution will not begin early.

Those who are eligible to receive the food may send a signed permission slip with another person to pick up their commodities. Bring a sack or box. For questions, contact the office at 462-6744.

Budget cap a problem

Associated Press
TOPEKA — Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback was expected to sign the state's budget by the weekend, but was being urged by the attorney general to veto specific provisions that could hamstring his office operations.

Brownback, a Republican, has until Sunday to sign the bill, which would spend \$14.5 billion in each of the next two fiscal years starting July 1.

However, Attorney General Derek Schmidt is urging his fellow Republican to veto a provision that would divert \$600,000 from licensing fees for concealed carry permits to fund general government programs. Schmidt also opposes

a salary cap on state agencies, including the Kansas Bureau of Investigation.

"The cap would hamstring both the attorney general's office and the KBI in performing core public safety functions by awkwardly micromanaging our ability to participate in federally funded and fee-funded programs, such as drug-enforcement efforts and certain prosecutions," said Schmidt, who has the backing of several law enforcement associations.

The governor has the power to veto individual line items in budget legislation. Because of the way legislators drew up the budget, though, he is limited in what he can do with the salary cap and additional cuts to higher education.



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