



County to sue state over mineral tax

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Thomas County will be joining a lawsuit against the state, spending an unknown amount of money on legal fees to fight the state's reallocation of severed mineral taxes.

On certain oil and gas wells, the state allocates a percentage of taxes to be held in a reserve account for each county. The counties can't touch the money unless their severance tax revenues decrease suddenly.

According to Commissioner Paul Steele, the state reallocated this tax revenue this year, resulting in a loss of about \$28,000 to Thomas County's reserve fund.

"I don't really think the governor's plan on cutting income tax to raise jobs is working and an awful lot of state agencies are getting big haircuts," said Steele.

Other counties have lost more revenue because of this reallocation, and they are gearing up to sue the state for its alleged "arbitrary and capricious" action, said Steele, urging the other commissioners to autho-

size Thomas County's participation in the lawsuit.

"I'd hate to authorize the expense of a lawsuit if we're going to lose the funds anyway," said Commissioner Mike Baughn, hesitating at first to approve the county's involvement.

After the commissioners took a short break, Baughn and Steele voted to authorize the county's support for the lawsuit, agreeing to share the financial burden of the suit. Sowers "passed," abstaining from the vote.

The commissioners did not place a limit on the amount of money they are willing to spend on this

suit.

Salary Increases

County employees will be getting a cost-of-living raise next year, thanks to a \$69,750 increase in wages that was also authorized by the commissioners at their meeting.

The county had budgeted for a 4 percent increase, but the commissioners agreed to a 3 percent increase instead after Baughn spent several weeks analyzing the salary increase and questioned the reasoning be-

See "COUNTY," Page 2

Temps fall, but frost stays away

A cold front brought cooler temperatures to northwest Kansas over the weekend, but little if any damage to gardens and crops.

Data from the Northwest Kansas Research and Extension Center shows that the temperature dropped to 32 degrees on Sunday.

Jeannie Falk, an agronomist with the Extension service, said she believes the freeze was in the morning.

She added that her gut instinct was that it only lasted for a short time, and probably did not damage plants, especially since 32 degrees is not close to the temperature needed for a killing frost.

Kurt Sexton, agriculture and

natural resources agent for Thomas County Extension, said temperatures in the low 30s could damage sorghum crops. Denise Singer, coordinator for the Thomas County Community Garden, said volunteers harvested some of their last crops Saturday to make sure they would not be damaged by frost.

The National Weather Service predicts high daytime temperatures in the 80s today and tomorrow and possible thunderstorms tomorrow night. After that, highs will drop into the 70s and then the 60s on Saturday. Lows should be in the 40s all week.

Wichita hacked; FBI investigates

WICHITA (AP) - The city of Wichita's electronic procurement website was the recent victim of a "sophisticated hacking operation," City Manager Robert Layton said.

Layton also said Tuesday that the FBI is working with city officials to determine what information was taken and how similar breaches can be prevented in the future. *The Wichita Eagle* reported (bit.ly/19jMHQ3).

Officials said the breach, which occurred over the weekend, may have affected as many as 29,000 vendors and employees, and that Social Security numbers, taxpayer identification numbers and banking information may have been compromised.

But Arlene Sokolowski, with the city's law department, said

so far none of the compromised accounts have been drawn on.

"Nobody has been a victim," Sokolowski said. "No one has gone into any accounts. However, just with that notification, we are suggesting those affected contact those credit agencies, put out a fraud alert, contact financial institutions and be proactive."

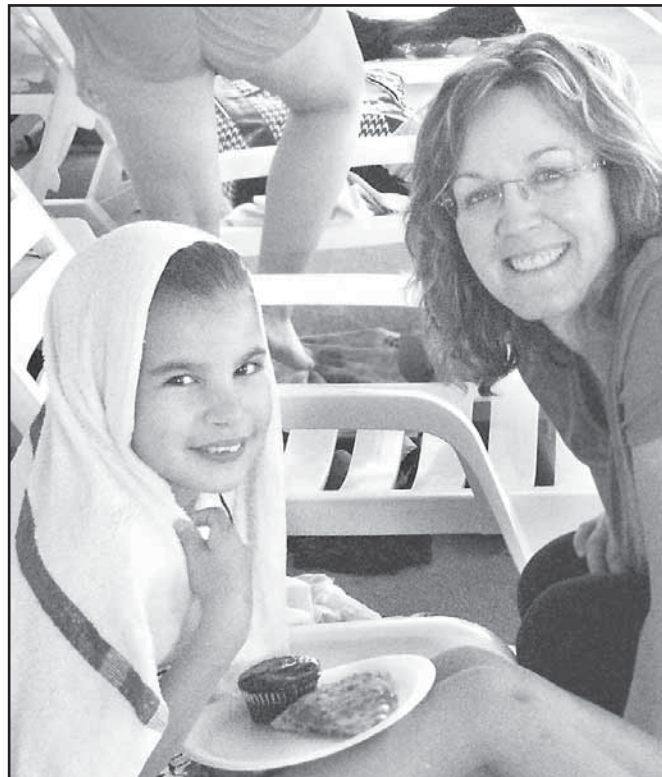
Layton said this wasn't the first time hackers have tried to gain access to the city's computer databases.

"The system always beats them back," he said. "But not this time. This was a pretty sophisticated hacking operation."

Wichita police Capt. Gavin Seiler said as soon as city officials discovered the attack they shut down the system.



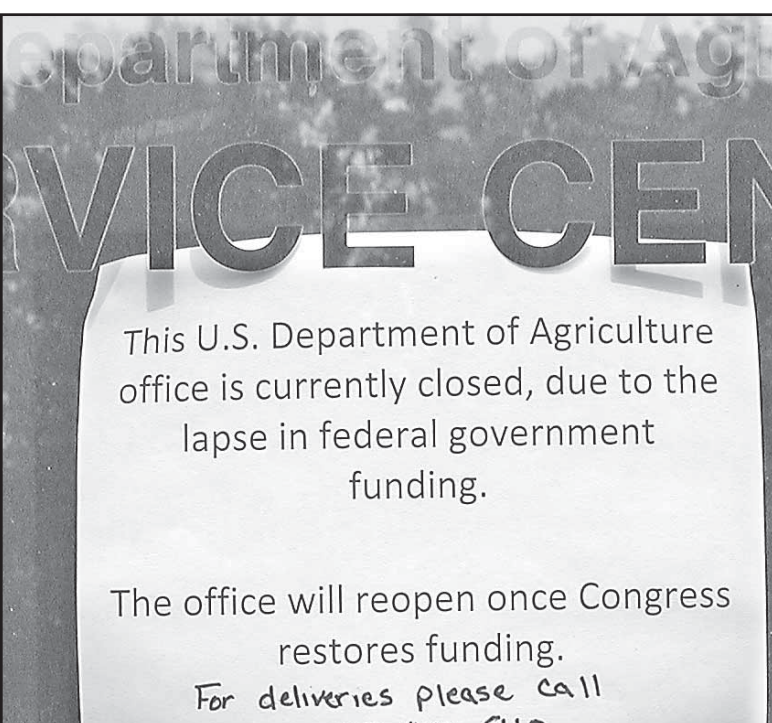
Big and little swimmers



ORVELLA ROMINE

Allie O'Neal (top) helped her "little" Morgan Durham, float in the pool at the Quality Inn Sunday at the pool party for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Thomas County. Bridget Bickner gave her little Deyanira Molina a hug (above). They were among 21 kids who came to the party, which is being used as a kickoff for the Bigs in School program. Several people from the community and two board members came to the party, including Jill Edmundson (left), who took the chance to hang out with Isabella Sanie.

Federal shutdown affects some local services



The U.S. Department of Agriculture closed its office here because of the federal government shutdown, but weather warnings continue to flow out of the Goodland forecast office and agencies that spend federal money say they've not been affected.

The Thomas County Conservation District has had to move its office into the Groundwater Management District No. 4 building on West Fourth Street, which formerly housed The Bank, until the shutdown is over.

District Manager Debbie Potter said her agency, which gets its money from the county and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, normally shares space with two federal agencies, the Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service. Both are shut down, along with the Agriculture Department website.

With those offices closed, she said, the district decided to find a temporary home. She can be reached at (785) 443-4830.

Otherwise, benefit checks such as Social Security continue to arrive, and state and local agencies that depend on federal money say they are operating normally.

"As far as road projects, we're not going to be seeing any impact," said Kristen Brands, regional spokesman for the Kansas

Department of Transportation in Norton.

She said that the department's federal money, which comes from the Federal Highway Administration, has not been affected.

Scott Mentzer, meteorologist in charge of the Goodland office of the National Weather Service, said agency is providing only "essential services." This includes the normal forecasts, advisories and severe weather reports, such as those for thunderstorms or tornados, he said, as well as advisories and forecasts.

The station is open and the website is available, though other, "nonessential" sites of its parent agency are down. The station is not offering tours, safety presentations or outreach activities, such as visits to area schools.

Jo DeYoung, business manager for Colby School District, said the district has all the money it needs right now. The shutdown is not having any effect on its operations.

At the Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center in Oakley, operations are normal so far, said Director Dan Thornton. The service center's budget is about \$12 million a year, he said, of which about \$5 million comes from the federal government,

\$4.5 million from the state and \$1.6 million from member school districts. Since the federal money had already been budgeted, Thornton said, it was "in the pipeline" and should keep coming as long as the people who handle it are still around.

"If (the shutdown) ends in a week or two weeks, we should be OK," he said. "It would certainly make it easier if they would just take care of business and get back on line with stuff."

Darvin Strutt, owner of Strutt Insurance Services, said the company is paying crop insurance claims, most of them backed by the government, as usual.

Post offices were running normally, but the U.S. Postal Service considers itself to be a private corporation for most purposes. The Kansas National Guard Armory here is open. However, an employee there would not say whether soldiers are having weekend drill, referring questions to a spokesman in Topeka who did not return several calls.