

**Editor's Note:**

With the interest in the upcoming election about the Goodland School bond issue and the City Commission and Goodland School Board we felt it was important to provide space to get as much information to the public as possible. The Goodland Star-News will continue to print letters about the election, but the deadline for the last letters will be noon on Wednesday, March 30 to be published on Friday, April 1. No letters about the election will be accepted after the deadline. — Tom Betz



**from our readers**

• to the editor

# School issues will remain after April 5 vote

To the Editor:

Right now in our community emotions are running high about the upcoming bond vote. Many people have chosen sides and are very committed to their position on this matter. It would appear there is a great divide in our community. I prefer to view it as a "wake-up call" as I see many of us asking, "What makes for a quality education?"

In the midst of this controversial issue, two facts will remain well after the vote, regardless of the results.

1. The financial challenges in our local district will not be resolved.

2. The challenge of providing a quality education and improving student performance will remain.

My request to our community is to unite after the votes have been counted. Stand behind the vote no matter which direction it goes — we still have a lot of work ahead of us. It is at that time we will need to be strong, united, and committed in seeking creative and positive ways to reduce spending and improve the education offered to our students. Challenging times often force creative solutions.

Some Possible Ways to Cut Expenses  
Modify busses to run main routes only — example would be to run north and south on K-27; east and west on old U.S. 24. Students who live within a given radius of school would need to provide their own transportation. Some schools have found it more cost effective to provide bicycles for their in-town students rather than provide bus service.

West and Central and Grant and Goodland High School could share princi-

pals.

4 day school week.

Charge a participation fee for extracurricular activities.

Allow homeschool and virtual school students to participate in extracurricular activities for a fee.

Students provide basic cleaning of facilities.

Greater staff contributions to health insurance benefits.

Shop class could contract for small projects.

Some Possible Ways to Improve Student Achievement

Strict school dress code — ie. slacks and button down shirts.

Work individually with students and parents to set goals for achievement — both academic and personal.

Hold students and parents more accountable for student behavior.

Create and expect an atmosphere of professionalism from both the staff and students — this is expressed through dress, language, body posture and attitude.

Train volunteers to provide academic enhancement opportunities.

These are some low-cost or cost-free ideas that are working in other places. Imagine how many more creative ideas must be out in our community.

Remember, when all is said and done, we will remain friends and neighbors committed to providing our children with the best possible education. We must never settle for anything less than excellence in education and in life.

Laurie Klemm  
Goodland

# Legislature passes bill to cut spending

After 10 weeks into the session, this week the House worked to reduce state spending and implement a tax structure that responsibly moves toward the elimination of personal income tax and reduces corporate income taxes.

This week the House passed a bill to reduce \$35 million in state spending in the current fiscal year.

Thursday, March 17, was a day to honor the late Jim Morrison and his family. Jim served 18 years in the Kansas State House of Representative, he severed on numerous committees and was still very active in his community as well.

We were please to have with us his wife, Karen, son, Jeff and wife Rachelle their children: Jaden, Carter, Darias, Kennedy and Campbell, his son Jeff and wife Michelle their children; Jarrett, Jace and Jacob and sister-in-law Laura Carr.

### Creation of Rural Opportunity Zones (ROZs)

More great news on a 102 to 18 vote on Friday, the House passed Governor Brownback's ROZ strategy to grow shrinking rural counties through income tax exemptions for certain out-of-state taxpayers who relocate to those counties.

The targeted counties are: Barber, Chautauqua, Cheyenne, Clark, Cloud, Comanche, Decatur, Edwards, Elk, Gove, Graham, Greeley, Greenwood, Hamilton, Harper, Hodgeman, Jewell, Kearny, Kingman, Kiowa, Lane, Lincoln, Logan, Marion, Mitchell, Morton, Ness, Norton, Osborne, Pawnee, Phillips, Pratt, Rawlins, Republic, Rooks, Rush, Russell, Scott, Sheridan, Sherman, Smith, Stafford, Stanton, Trego, Thomas, Wallace, Washington, Wichita, Wilson and Woodson.

The bill allows counties to participate in a state-matching program to repay student loans up to \$15,000 for Kansas students who move to counties designated Rural Opportunity Zones.

This bill was one of Governor Brownback's original legislative priorities and I think it is an excellent tool to help the rural areas of Kansas and look forward to seeing this program implemented.

### House Passes Bill Saving \$35 Million

Last Friday, Governor Brownback made allotments (cuts) that reduced the FY 2011 budget by \$56.5 million to ensure state revenues for the year could cover the expenditures.

However, the Governor does not have the statutory authority to create an ending balance through the allotment processes. Although allotments balance the budget revenue, they do not leave the state with an ending balance on July 1.

In order to provide a healthy cushion,



## rick billinger

• state rep.

the House Appropriations Committee drafted a bill containing provisions from the rescission bill that were agreed to by both the House and Senate conferees during the conference committee process. On Wednesday, the House passed this bill which accomplishes a \$35 million balance at the end of FY 2011.

### Kansas Public Employee's Retirement System (KPERs)

The House Pensions and Benefits Committee passed HB 2333 that increases the state's contribution to KPERs from .6 percent to .8 percent and adjusts future benefits by changing the multiplier for future service from 1.75 to 1.4. The multiplier change does not apply to those who have already retired. Those who have worked for 25 years will keep those years at the 1.75 rate. If they work an additional eight years or more, those years will be credited at the lower multiplier. HB 2333 provides for funds raised through the sale of state assets to be directed to KPERs. I have heard from many people who are in the KPERs retirement program and all have not liked these changes, so when this bill comes up on the floor I will not support it. I would like for the legislature to set-up a committee with participation from several different sectors, Teachers, KDOT, Highway Patrol and other State Employees to all work on a plan we can all live with.

### Tax Debate

On Thursday and Friday, the House spent hours debating the best tax policy to spur economic growth.

March to Economic Growth Act (MEGA) — The MEGA bill reduces the corporate and individual income tax with a trigger based on growth. If state tax receipts increase over the immediately preceding fiscal year, then a corresponding reduction in both taxes will occur. The overall goal of this bill is institutional change that will shift to more consumption (sales) taxes and less production (income) taxes. The House is committed to collecting Kansas tax revenue by growing the economy rather than increasing the tax rate on current revenue streams. By providing a consistent and less complicated tax structure, this bill limits the role of state government and fosters business growth and investment. From side-by-side comparisons we know that states without individual income tax experience population and revenue growth at a con-

sistently higher rate than states with high rates. Oklahoma is one of these States that has seen growth with this type of a program.

Promoting Economic Growth Through Tax Credits

SB 61, which passed the House 92 to 22 on Friday, changes the High Performance Incentive Program (HPIP) income tax credits and expands the individual development account tax credit. His bill modifies the HPIP program beginning in 2013 to allow a portion of previously earned HPIP credits which have been carried forward to be claimed against the tax liability. In addition, SB 61 expands the refundable tax credit available to individual development account program contributors from 50 percent to 75 percent greatly increasing its attractiveness to businesses and its usefulness as an economic development tool.

### Reducing Government Waste in Food Sales Tax Refunds

SB 193 requires social security numbers to verify the identities of dependents for those claiming food sales tax refunds. This legislation is aimed at reducing food sales tax fraud and saving state money by ensuring proper documentation. It is estimated this could save the State anywhere from 13.6 to 15.6 million dollars. These are the type of bills that get me excited.

### Smaller Government Through Public Participation

On Friday, Governor Brownback announced the launch of a website that allows Kansans to submit laws and regulations they believe should be repealed. When an idea is submitted to the website, <http://repealer.ks.gov>, the office of the Repealer will run a cost-benefit analysis on each law or regulation. Laws picked for repeal will be sent to the government entity with jurisdiction. Kansans who submit repeal proposals will receive a status update within 30 days of submitting their idea. The goal of this website is to identify and eliminate state laws and regulations that hinder opportunities for Kansans and Kansas businesses.

Next week, the House is scheduled to be in session for the majority of the day Monday through Wednesday to pass legislation that has been voted out of committee. The House will not hold session on Thursday and Friday to allow conference committees to negotiate the differences between the House and Senate versions of legislation.

If you have any input on any issues which will come before the Legislature this year please contact me at [rick.billinger@house.ks.gov](mailto:rick.billinger@house.ks.gov) or call me at 785-899-4700.

# People need correct budget information

To the Editor:

After reading two articles reported in *The Goodland Star-News* that have incorrect information, I feel I must write and give the citizens of Sherman County the correct information.

The Weekend Edition of *The Goodland Star-News* for March 4, has an article called "Citizens Ask Tough Questions About Bond Issue" on the front page. As I read through the article, I found Pat Schiefen reported "Board Member Amy Sederstrom asked about the bill in the Kansas Legislature that could cut in half aid to districts on bonds." This was not the question I asked. That question was a prewritten question prepared for the community meeting.

The question I asked at the Community Meeting was as follows (paraphrased):

"Having just been at the school board meeting held at 6 p.m. on Feb. 28, the board was informed of the budget cuts coming from the State of Kansas. The exact amount of the cuts are still unknown because nothing has been passed by the legislators. However, the accumulated cuts presented to the board were \$428,180 for a \$157 cut on the base aid and \$493,496 cut on the base aid if the legislators increased it to \$197. These cuts will take place by the time the school doors are opened this fall... August 2011. At the next March school board meeting, the board will discuss these budget concerns. However, it was commented at the 6 p.m. board meeting the dollar amount

had the equivalency of 8 teaching jobs. With this financial information presented to us at the board meeting, are we building the correct size building for what we are facing?"

Cristy Joy, the architect from Archi+Etc. of Lincoln, Neb., answered the budget concern question.

The second incorrect information is in Friday, March 18, edition under the article called "School District Staff Finding Ways to Cut". The correct budget total presented to the Board of Education on Monday March 14, will be a loss of \$428,180 to the general fund by the fall 2011. Mrs. Angelos reported she had spoken to Dale Dennis with State School Finance and believes that \$157 cut to base aid will be fairly accurate. Thus, Goodland (USD 352) School District began the school year with a published August 2010 budget of \$6,600,542, and by fall 2011 the amount to the general fund will be \$6,172,362. This is a loss of \$428,180. Per Article 22 - "Reduction of Teaching Staff" of the USD 352 Negotiated Agreement, Mrs. Angelos explained she would be visiting each school within the next two weeks to get staff input on ways to find cuts in the budget.

I feel the correct budget information must be given to the public for them to make informed decisions.

Amy Sederstrom  
Goodland (USD 352) School Board Member

# What happened to gloomy predictions?

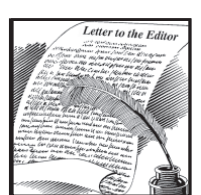
Economic reports show most job growth in our country this year has come from small- and medium-size businesses. That trend will accelerate, according to the recently released Small Business Index from the Center for Excellence in Service at the University of Maryland's Robert H. Smith School of Business.

Nearly 3.8 million new jobs will be created by small businesses with fewer than 100 employees in 2011, says the report. That will be enough alone to lower the U.S. unemployment rate by 2.4 percent. The survey, conducted in January, found only 2 percent of small businesses planned to lay off workers.

Major health insurance companies nationwide are reporting dramatic increases in small businesses offering health insurance to employees. This reverses a trend for small businesses dropping insurance because of affordability.

This is not what opponents of health-care reform told us would happen if Congress passed the Affordable Care Act (ACA). They warned us strenuously before health reform became law on March 23 of last year, small businesses would not only stop hiring out of fear of the future, but would begin laying off workers because of anticipated new taxes, fees and health-insurance mandates under the law. Small businesses were supposed to start dropping health insurance because the health reform law would drive up premiums. These dire predictions continued right up until last year's November elections.

Fortunately, the gloom and doomers were wrong. Those of us who supported the Affordable Care Act have tried valiantly to put out more realistic predictions about how the health law was going to help small businesses. There will not



## from other pens

• commentary

be new taxes, fees or health-insurance mandates for small businesses with 50 or fewer employees (approximately 96 percent of all businesses). However, most of the mainstream media preferred to report on the negative tea-reading.

But now the good news for small business is rolling in and the positive future effect of the now 1-year-old health law is becoming clear.

More than four million U.S. small businesses with fewer than 25 employees are eligible to receive health-insurance tax credits under the health law. That's 87.3 percent of all small businesses in the country the health law can help by making health insurance more affordable.

As for the Affordable Care Act dramatically increasing the cost of health insurance, a senior vice president at Harvard Pilgrim says the federal law has only increased premiums by 1 percent.

The health law is helping small-business owners who have been locked out of health insurance because of their own pre-existing condition. Right now, these entrepreneurs are eligible for affordable coverage from new high-risk pools established under the health law.

This year, the Affordable Care Act is requiring at least 80 percent of every premium dollar being paid in small group health insurance plans is actually paying for medical costs — not marketing, administrative salaries or profit. If not, the policyholder is owed a refund.

These benefits for small business are

in place now.

Today, small businesses are paying as much as 18 percent higher premiums than big businesses. This is a result of higher administration costs for small groups. In 2014, this extra cost is eliminated, so small-business employees, along with individuals, will be able to purchase their coverage from the new health insurance exchanges in each state.

A small business with only one employee with a pre-existing condition finds itself priced out of the market or paying highly inflated premiums. In 2014, health insurance companies will no longer be allowed to charge higher rates because of pre-existing conditions.

And because no one will be denied health insurance because of a pre-existing condition, aspiring entrepreneurs will no longer be locked into a job because of health-insurance benefits. As a result, ranks of small businesses should expand.

The one year anniversary of the Affordable Care Act is truly something small businesses should celebrate for what it has already done. The future will be even better.

Frank Knapp, Jr. is president and CEO of the South Carolina Small Business Chamber of Commerce and serves on the steering committee for the American Sustainable Business Council.

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