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Thermopolis
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SPECIAL INTERNET PREVIEW

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Utility rate increase

by J.D. Stetson

The Thermopolis Town Council passed the first of three readings of three ordinances to raise utility rates for water, sewer and sanitation.

Based on early budget figures, if the town does not increase its rates for all three of the utilities, it is expected to have a \$326,000 deficit in the next budget year due to cost increases to provide the services.

The additional revenue from the increases should eliminate the deficit by providing an additional \$362,400 for the enterprise funds.

If the council passes all three readings of the ordinances, the average home using about 3,000 gallons a month will see an increase in their normal monthly utility bill for all three services of about \$14. Small homes that use about 1,000 gallons would see an increase of \$13. A small business using 1,000 gallons would see a \$21.70 increase.

■ **Water:** The new ordinance creates a monthly base charge

on top of the current water rate.

Current water rates for Thermopolis residents are \$3.05 for the first 1,000 gallons and \$3.05 for each additional \$1,000 gallons.

The amount of the base charge increases with the size of tap a residence or business uses. For a 5/8-inch or 3/4-inch tap, the base charge is \$5. A 1-inch tap would have a \$9 base rate, a 1 1/2-inch tap would have a \$20 base charge.

Town engineer Heath Overfield told the council the base charge should bring in an additional \$84,000 for the water fund, based on the towns estimated 1,400 residential taps.

■ **Sewer:** Under the new ordinance, sewer will have a base rate of \$21 a month for residential units in Thermopolis and East Thermopolis. The town also has included a fee of \$1 for every 1,000 gallons used, which will be calculated based on an average of monthly treated water usage for the preceding three months.

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FFA Petting Zoo a hit for youngsters



Rudy Evens, Autumn Bansemer, Samantha Struemke and Trinity Mohr pet a goat at the FFA Petting Zoo Feb. 24 in the Vocational Arts Building at Hot Springs County

High School. The event brought in several classes from Ralph Witters Elementary School as well as several Thermopolis preschools. — J.D. Stetson photo

Commission receives EDC casino report

by Cindy Glasson

The Thermopolis-Hot Springs County Economic Development Company presented a report to the Hot Springs County Commissioners regarding possible development of a casino south of Thermopolis at their meeting Feb. 15.

The report was compiled by GVA Marquette Advisors on behalf of the Northern Arapaho Business Council and covers everything from financial gains to housing that has affected Fremont County with the development of the Wind River Casino and adjoining properties.

The economic impact analysis of the casino was prepared under the assumption that all expenditures at the casino are derived from "new" money that either comes from outside the Riverton area or represents additional money spent by the area residents.

The report states, "the money

spent at the gaming complex is all added to the economy, without factoring in any decline in the business level at the other entertainment and recreation facilities in the area or in other goods and services or leisure activities on which this money might alternatively be spent."

In other words, the study does not take into account money spent at a casino may lower the amount of money tourists might spend at other spots in Hot Springs County such as the pools, shopping or restaurants.

GVA Marquette Advisors call this the "substitution effect" and in the report state their research was unable to discover any credible means by which to calculate the effect.

The property summary, the facilities included in the casino complex, states the original facility was built in 2001 with

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Wyoming Legislature to wrap up Thursday

Bill about honoring U.S. flag fails

by Joe Sovia

Public schools will not be required to display an American flag in each classroom nor will the Pledge of Allegiance be mandated after House Bill 204 failed in the Wyoming Senate on third reading by a 14-16 vote.

The legislation would have also required public schools to have a teaching program on Constitution Day, according to Rep. Lorraine Quarberg (R-HD28) of Thermopolis. She was a co-sponsor of the bill.

"I was shocked. I'm surprised they killed that bill," Quarberg said after Tuesday's session of the Wyoming Legislature. "I don't know what their (the Senate's) logic was for it."

HB204 had passed overwhelmingly in the House before going to the Senate for debate.

Senate File 47, concealed weapons, passed both the Senate and House and was sitting on Gov. Matt Mead's desk when he returned to his office Wednesday. Quarberg, a co-sponsor of the bill, said a bill-signing ceremony was held at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday. Moments later, the governor signed HB167, castle doctrine modifications, also sponsored by Quarberg. It passed the Senate

See Quarberg on page 11

Senate kills anti-abortion measures

by Karla Pomeroy

Friday the citizens of Wyoming should be safe once again, Sen. Gerald Geis quipped during his weekly interview Monday. The reason: The Legislature is set to adjourn on Thursday and won't be making any new laws.

Monday was the final day for second reading of bills and Tuesday was last day for third reading to give legislators time on Wednesday and Thursday to concur with differences and finish any conference committee meetings.

Geis said it did not take long for both houses to reach concurrence on the budget, which has been signed by both leaders in each house and is on the way to Gov. Matt Mead's desk.

With deadlines Monday and Tuesday, Geis said he didn't foresee any major bills not getting the full three readings. There were 14 bills on the agenda for second reading Monday.

Included on second reading were:

• House Bill 194 that would require people obtaining or renewing a driver's license to provide information for next-of-kin emergency contact information. The license would have a special symbol on it to signify that the information was on file with the Department of

See Geis on page 11



Rodeo clown Marvin Nash of Cheyenne talks about bullying Feb. 23 with a class at Kiddie Kollege. Nash was in town to moderate and promote the Bullying Hurts program Feb. 24, funded by the Safe & Drug-free Schools program through the Wyoming Department of Education. — J.D. Stetson photo

School bullying addressed

by Cindy Glasson

About 30 parents and students attended a discussion on bullying at Thermopolis Middle School Thursday night that included each of the principals in Hot Springs County School District No. 1, the mayor and student leaders from the Rachel's Challenge program.

The town hall meeting was sponsored by Safe and Drug-free Schools through the Wyoming Department of Education.

Marvin Nash was the moderator for the evening. He created the Bullying Hurts national program nine years ago.

Each of the principals briefly described their building's policy on bullying and the steps that are taken when a report of bullying is made.

Deb Brown, principal at Ralph Witters Elementary, told the parents in attendance their stand at the elementary school is to teach the students how to treat others.

Brown said the age of the students means bullying is a learning opportunity and each one is handled individually. While Rachel's Challenge is part of the RWE curriculum, Brown said their main focus with the students is for them to be safe, feel safe and advocate for themselves.

In the middle school environment, principal Matt Spring said most of the bullying incidents are generally just a conflict between students.

Darby Abbott, an eighth grader and peer leader in Rachel's Challenge, said she doesn't think the Challenge curriculum is making as big an impact at the middle school as it is in the lower grades.

Another eighth-grade peer leader, Logan Kay, agreed, saying he doesn't feel his peers get as much out of the Challenge as the younger kids.

"We all grew up together," Kay said. "We know each other. I don't think we have a lot of it (bullying) going on."

High school student Jake Moore echoed the underclassmen saying, "I think we're really lucky we live where we're at. There isn't as much of it going on here."

On the high school level things are a bit different, according to principal Dustin Hunt.

The focus in high school is educating the students on the different forms bullying can take.

Hunt said with all the technology the students are exposed to, bullying can be as simple as a text message on a cell phone, an email or a posting on a social network website.

Relational aggression

Nash referred to Hunt's comments on using technology for bullying as "relational aggression."

If there is anything good about the relational aggression, Hunt said, it's that it is right there in black and white, concrete evidence of the bullying.

"It eliminates the 'he said-she said' in bullying," Nash said.

Nash told the audience the deadly shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado in 1999 changed the face of school security and brought bullying out into the open.

"We've gone from a time when we had monthly fire drills to having full-blown procedures in place for lock downs of our schools," he said.

Nash also provided some explanation for the "wolf pack" and "mean girls" phenomena associated with bullying, groups of students who get a kick out of bullying others.

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Bullying

He said these groups get an almost euphoric feeling from bullying and using texting and other technology to do it makes it less personal for them.

"They don't have to bully face to face," Nash said.

Thermopolis Mayor Bill Malloy was also part of the panel, not just as mayor, but as a 44-year educator in Hot Springs County.

"I've seen lots of forms of bullying," Malloy said, "but the worst form I see is exclusion.

"This causes all kinds of depression and makes the kids almost hate school. It's not just the

physical bullying, it's the verbal and emotional kind."

Assistant county attorney Bill Struemke was in attendance at the meeting as a parent, but Nash asked him, in his professional role, how much of the electronic type of bullying has come through his office.

Struemke said he had not seen anything specific come through the county attorney's office, but like anything else, it would have to go through certain processes and there are alternative areas the electronic bullying could be sent through,

such as the Youth Alternatives program.

As a parent, Struemke spoke about his own son and the bullying he had been exposed to as a new student in the district.

"My son was heavily bullied," he said. "It's a real issue in this town. I agree, small towns are tighter, but the outsiders are tested."

On the middle school level, when an issue between students gets to a certain level, both parties have to fill out a "No Contact Contract," stating they will stay away from each other.

Struemke pointed out that his son had several bullies and contracts were filled out by everyone involved, and he agreed it had an effect to a certain point.

"On the other hand, each of the bullies gets one contract from my son, yet my son is sitting there with a stack of contracts from the bullies," Struemke said. "That makes the student sit back and think maybe the problem is with him. It victimizes the victim all over again."

One parent pointed out that it's not always necessarily the new students that are picked

on, as some students are bullied year after year.

Other parents voiced concern over "how loud do we need to yell" to be heard by the school system, especially when there is physical abuse from bullies.

Another parent said the school also needs to be aware that the parents of the bullies are sometimes expressing bullying behavior themselves.

Nash said communication is definitely the key to the bullying behavior – communication with the school, the students and the parents.

A bullying phone number has been set up that allows students to forward bullying or threatening text messages they have received or to let school officials know when bullying is going on.

The number goes directly to the principals and allows them to take appropriate action immediately.

The bullying number is 307-840-9145.

More resources on bullying and the signs to look for if you think your child may be getting bullied are available at bullyinghurts.com.

Quarberg

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Judiciary Committee.

HB29, DUI, elimination of right to refuse test, passed the Senate 20-10 on third reading. An amendment was adopted Monday that would authorize law enforcement officers to obtain a search warrant before forcing a suspected drunk driver to undergo a breath, urine or blood test for alcohol. The bill went to Gov. Matt Mead's desk Wednesday for his signature.

Quarberg voted against the legislation, saying, "I have always struggled with making that testing mandatory. Under the old law, you have the option to submit to the test. The new statute says you have no choice.

"It's almost a self-incriminating thing. It bothers me if you were under arrest and then forced to take the test," she said. "It helps the officer build a case against you."

Quarberg believes passage of the bill will not deter people from driving while under the influence of alcohol.

Senate Joint Resolution 1, an amendment to grant residents perpetual rights to hunt, fish and trap in Wyoming, also went to the governor's desk. It was passed 56-3 by the House Monday after passing 23-7 in the Senate in late February. If signed by Mead, the amendment would be on November 2012 general election ballot.

"I was supportive of that one. It was a good idea to put in. It strengthens our position when we deal with Federal lands that deal with multiple use," Quarberg said. "That sends a clear message to the Federal government."

Quarberg sponsored HB246, National Guard, disposal of land, has been signed by the governor. It will allow local ownership of National Guard armories such as the one in Thermopolis.

There was a plethora of legislation dealing with education in this legislative session. Most of them went by the wayside, giving way to the most prominent bills.

SF146, Teacher Accountability Act, was adopted by the Joint Conference Committee on Tuesday by a 28-1 vote after a compromise between the House and Senate. The original bill would have required school district teacher performance evaluations to be based in part on student achievement, directed the State Board of Education to establish performance criteria based upon educational accountability measures to be established by law and to establish performance as a basis for contract determinations.

SF70, education accountability, was in Joint Conference Committee as of Wednesday morning in an effort to work out differences between the House and Senate.

HB35, Health Care Choice and Protection Act, died before making it out of Senate committee. The bill that would have declared Obamacare null and void.

Time has just about run out for HB74, validity of marriages. A legislative committee was deadlocked on the issue of recognizing same-sex marriages from another state.

"I don't think they can come to an agreement," Quarberg said. "My guess is the bill is going to die."

Also in committee was HB13, Hathaway success curriculum. The House rejected the insistence of the Senate that foreign language should remain mandatory for some Hathaway Scholarship recipients. The House wants to make it optional.

Without much ado, the supplemental budget was sent to the governor's desk for his approval. The House maintained its position that \$10 million would go to towns and counties for use at their discretion while the Senate wanted it to be used for capital construction. Quarberg said the Senate conceded to the House on that issue.

"It was a big deal," she said.

Quarberg said Wednesday morning she had been re-appointed to the Select Water Committee, which oversees water projects all over the state.

Geis

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Transportation.

• HB204 would require the United States flag to be on display in each classroom of public schools, and that the Pledge of Allegiance be recited during the first class of each school day. Each district will develop a policy that provides an exception for students who do not wish to recite the pledge.

• HB208 that exempts off-road vehicles being used for agricultural purposes from being registered.

Monday's third reading consent list included HB23 – sex offender registration amendments, HB40 – compensation for persons exonerated based on DNA and HB42 – coroner record confidentiality. The latter bill would make toxicology reports, photographs, video recordings or audio recordings of the scene of the death or made in the course of a postmortem examination or autopsy by a coroner confidential and not part of public record.

Under the regular third reading list was HB29 that would eliminate a driver's right to refuse to take a sobriety test in the case of suspected driving under the influence.

Also on third reading is House Bill 120 on public meetings. Geis said there is concern about requiring small districts to record executive sessions.

"It will be close if it passes," Geis said Monday.

Along with requiring an audio recording of executive sessions, the bill requires 12-hour notice of special meetings and requires the presiding officer to specify as much as possible reason for executive session. It was amended in the House to protect attorney-client privilege and to state that type or reason for litigation does not need to be specified when going into executive session.

Geis said the Senate did not get to about a dozen bills by Friday's deadline for House bills to get to the Committee of the Whole. As of Friday night, more than 200 bills had died or become inactive for a number of reasons.

Legislation that was defeated by the Senate Committee of the Whole Friday was HB251, which would have required certain information be given to women 24 hours before an abortion was performed.

The bill died on a 14-15-1 vote with Geis voting in favor.

Bills that will not be passed this session include:

- HB33 that would have allowed drivers to go 10 mph over the speed limit while passing another car.
- HB72 that would have provided a process for teacher merit pay.

- HB121 updating the public records act.
- SF51 that would have increased the fines for drivers not wearing seat belts from \$25 to \$75 and would have made it a primary offense.

- Senate Joint Resolution 8 that would have made the definition of marriage between a man and a woman as a constitutional amendment and sent it to the voters in 2012.

House Bill 74 on the validity of marriage is in conference committee to iron out differences between the House and Senate. The bill would nullify any unions from other states that are not between a man and a woman.

The Senate added an amendment that would allow "parties to a domestic or other legal civil union lawfully entered into in another state, commonwealth, territory, district or possession of the United States or a foreign nation, which are not recognized as a marriage under the laws of Wyoming, shall be entitled access to the courts of the state for the purposes of resolving disputes that arise out of their domestic or other legal civil union."

The House did not concur with the change.

The Education Accountability bill, SF70, grew contentious with the Senate voting unanimously on Monday to not concur with changes made on the House side.

The bill would create the Wyoming Accountability in Education Act and establish a statewide education accountability system.

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Casino

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several remodeling projects and expansions over a seven-year period.

No mention has been made in any information gleaned from the Tribe of size of a proposed casino or any plans for expansion that may arise over the next decade.

Casino: second largest employer

The report shows the Wind River Casino as the second largest employer in Fremont County with 504 employees. First on the list is Fremont County School District with 560 employees.

Nowhere in the report is there a listing for the number of employees for the major oil companies in the area.

The report indicates the average wage of employees at the casino complex is \$26,624 per year, just \$4,500 per year over national poverty level for a family of four, \$22,050.

Three of the departments listed by the casino are well below the poverty level, ranging from \$16,550 to \$20,361 per year.

The report goes on to show that while a good deal of the annual purchases of goods and services by the Wind River Casino to run the complex in Fremont

County are purchased locally or in Wyoming, about 75 percent are purchased out of state.

For instance, the raw materials sold on-site, all food and beverages, fuel purchased to sell at the convenience store and smoke shop, are purchased out of state, as many are not available within Wyoming.

The cost of the goods sold amounts to \$12.5 million.

Equipment rental for the facilities used for operations are made outside Fremont County and 75 percent of the professional fees, consultants, attorneys, accounting firms and so forth are also retained out of state.

A summary of these costs is broken down in the report, showing approximately \$4.9 million is spent locally with \$9.3 million being taken out of Wyoming.

Impact on tourism

The study goes on to show the impact on tourism in Fremont County, saying roughly 60 percent of the visitors to Wind River Casino comes from within the county, leaving just 40 percent of the visitors as actual tourism.

Although no estimates are available on what a casino would do for the tourism in Hot Springs County, the report states the

"typical casino visitor from outside Fremont County spends just \$5-\$10 in the local area."

There will be no sales tax impact for Hot Springs County as "gaming and other expenditures at the casino complex will not be subject to sales tax, since the facility is located on Trust land."

One issue the commissioners have with the possibility of a casino in Hot Springs County is the effect on law enforcement and other emergency services.

Information provided to the EDC by Carl Freeman, manager of 911 Services in Fremont County regarding emergency calls to the Wind River Casino states that in 31 months of operations there were 46 sheriff's department responses, 12 for the Tribal police and three calls for other jurisdictions.

In addition, there were 44 ambulance calls and one fire call.

A comparison made between calls to the casino and calls to Wal-Mart during the 31-month period, shows there are 7.6 times as many calls to Wal-Mart than the casino. There is no information included in the report from the EDC that identifies the nature of the calls to either business so it is unknown what type of calls they were.

Town

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The usage charge will have a minimum charge of \$2 a month.

Currently, residents pay a base charge of \$19 a month for sewer without a usage charge.

Overfield said adding the usage charge creates an incentive for people to use less water.

The town expects the new base rate to make an additional \$49,200 and the usage charge to make \$126,000, based on usage statistics produced in 2008.

■ **Sanitation:** The new ordinance increases the monthly charge for sanitation services from \$14.30 a month to \$18.30 a month and keeps it at a flat rate for residents.

For commercial collection, the ordinance charges \$28 minimum monthly charge for collection of a canister 25 percent full or less on average. The charge increases depending on how full the canister is on average and the number of canisters at a location. One full canister would be \$96 a month.

Some businesses have more than one canister located at their business. Collection at a location with two canisters would be \$180 a month. Collection of five or more canisters would have a special rate of 75 percent of \$96 for each canister.

The ordinance does not affect

how often the canisters are emptied and the rates are based on the usual usage.

The rate increase does not completely erase the expected deficit in the sanitation fund, which is about \$139,000. The new rate is expected to raise about \$103,200