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Thermopolis
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Rick Santorum given nod in county's Republican caucus

by Cindy Glasson

The Hot Springs County Republican Committee held its caucus Feb. 23 at the county annex building.

Party chairman Nathan Winters conducted the meeting along with Charles Curley, allowing attendees the chance to speak on behalf of each of the Republican candidates for president.

Warren Kruse spoke in favor of candidate Ron Paul, pointing out the candidate had already raised \$31.1 million toward his campaign, compared to just \$7 million by opponent Rick Santorum – indicating a grass roots backing for Paul and his platform.

In addition, Kruse brought forth sources showing 87 percent of American troops favor Paul.

"These men and women are willing to support the man who would support the constitution," Kruse said.

Also speaking for Paul, Michael Gular said the "numbers

have shown he's the only candidate that can bring in support from both sides (Republican and Democrat)."

Gene Boehmke, a fund raiser for the Republican Party, backed candidate Newt Gingrich.

"I make a lot of phone calls for the party as a fund raiser," Boehmke said. "The people I'm talking to say Newt's the smartest candidate. He's been there, done that. If there were a debate he (Gingrich) would wipe the floor with Obama."

A backer for Rick Santorum, Jim Bennett, said the party has to look to who has the best ideas about the issues.

"We need a firm stand with the Constitution," Bennett said. "If he (Santorum) makes a mistake it will be an honest mistake, not one made for a political agenda."

Mike Baker also stands behind Santorum, saying, "I have concerns that the others don't know where they are at any given time. He (Santorum) stays on message and I see him growing

as a candidate."

Interestingly, no one stood to speak on behalf of the other republican candidate, Mitt Romney.

The group also split into its four precincts to discuss changes to the Republican platform, both long-term and short-term goals for the party.

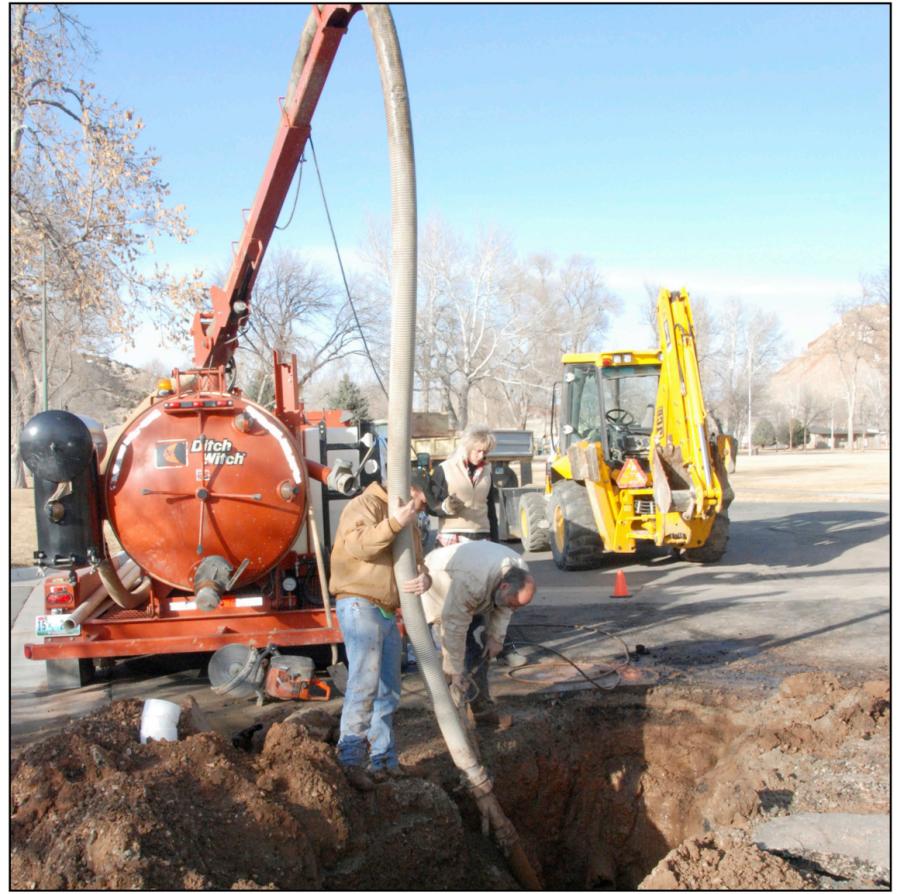
Discussions were diverse, ranging from crime and punishment to education, energy and drilling to taxation, a balanced budget, landowners' rights and employment.

To finish out the evening, a straw poll was taken to get a feel as to which candidate may receive the most votes within Hot Springs County come November.

Santorum came out on top in the poll with nine votes, followed closely by Paul with eight. Romney and Gingrich each received four votes.

The Hot Springs County Republican Convention will be held March 10 at 1 p.m. at the county annex building.

State Park water line break



Steve's Plumbing uncovers a broken mineral water line between Days Inn and the Wyoming Pioneer Home Monday afternoon. The line is part of the water system that used to deliver mineral water to Hot Springs County Memorial Hospital and currently delivers water to the fountain at the southeast corner of the park. See story on page 9.

DEQ receives help from locals on stream pollutant project

by J.D. Stetson

About 21 people attended a public meeting hosted by the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) Feb. 21 at Big Horn Federal in Thermopolis.

In a follow-up interview, DEQ representative Kevin Hyatt said the meeting was well attended and the department received valuable comments from the public with regard to its modeling efforts to determine the cause of an increase in bacteria in certain watersheds across the Big Horn Basin.

Overall, the department is examining 16 different segments of watersheds across the basin as part of its TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) project.

In Hot Springs County, the department has observed an increase in bacteria in a small segment of Kirby Creek about 10 miles upstream from its main connection. The department is in the process of determining the cause of the increase, and it is processing the possible sources of the pollution.

Hyatt said the most common causes for increases like those that the department has seen

in the basin include septic tanks, livestock waste and wildlife waste.

Information received at the meeting was valuable because the department wants to know when and where cattle are pastured close to the stream and also what kind of cattle are located near the stream as well as keep the public informed of the project.

"The model still needs fine tuned," Hyatt said, adding the department plans to continue the model through the end of March.

Residents should expect another public meeting in the future for the department to present its ideas to reduce the bacteria after the model is finished.

The department is still collecting information for the model. It would appreciate more input from landowners and ranchers in the area to help finish the model.

For more information about the TMDL and for resources to contact the DEQ, visit <http://deq.state.wy.us/wqd/watershed/TMDL/BigHorn-TMDL/BigHornTMDL.htm>, or contact Hyatt at 307-777-8582.

Spring snowmelt update

by J.D. Stetson

Potential for spring flooding remains low for Wyoming, based on the latest statistics, according to a recent report from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA).

The report details snow water equivalents (SWEs) for much of the state being below average across the majority of western, central and southern Wyoming watersheds in early February.

A map detailing SWEs and flood categories shows low or low-to-moderate potential for wa-

tersheds affecting Hot Springs County.

The map indicates SWEs in the Owl Creek range were between 97 percent to 120 percent normal in early February. The Wind River Range feeding Boysen Reservoir is in the same percentage range, but with some areas between 121 percent to 143 percent normal.

Across the state, areas expected to have moderate potential for flooding at current snow-pack levels are along the Powder (Clear and Rock creeks),

Tongue (Little and Big Goose creeks) and eastern Big Horn (Shell Creek, Tensleep Creek, Nowood River) watersheds, according to the report.

The Little Snake River, southern Wind River Basin (Popo Agie River) and the Shoshone River Basin have low-to-moderate potential for headwater snowmelt flooding, based on current numbers.

All other headwater locations across the state have a low potential for flooding due to snowmelt, according to the report.

FFA petting zoo



Charlie Oliver pets a miniature pony during a petting zoo Thursday, Feb. 23, hosted by FFA students during National FFA Week. — J.D. Stetson photo

House to send \$3.2 billion budget bill to committee

by Joe Sovo

Amendments to the House's budget bill have been aplenty this week during the 61st Wyoming Legislature Budget Session at the state capitol in Cheyenne. Both the House and Senate started with \$3.2 billion budget bills. Both have passed out of the respective bodies on third reading.

A contrast arose when the Senate approved a \$3.2 million amendment for additional funding for treatment of people who suffer from acquired brain injuries or developmental disabilities. A similar House amendment by Rep. Keith Gingery for \$3.5 million in increased funding to address the waiting periods for people who need treatment failed, however. Gov. Matt Mead had asked lawmakers to put up \$12.5 million for the program in his budget request.

Rep. Lorraine Quarberg (R-Thermopolis, HD28) said Monday there had been extensive discussion of capital construction projects for the University of Wyoming. She said that while the UW College of Engineering building is 100 years old, that priority has been placed below renovation of the 40-year-old Performing Arts building.

"There are a lot of amendments back and forth for not renovating the College of Engineering building," Quarberg said. "We're questioning how UW is prioritizing what they want to accomplish."

According to Quarberg, the Joint Appropriations Committee (JAC) has "frozen" salary increases for state employees in terms of an across-the-board raise, which would have come from the state's General Fund. Many legislators believe state employees and employees of UW and the state's community colleges should be on a level playing field in

terms of salary increases.

There have been various amendments pertaining to the issue, one of them co-sponsored by Quarberg and Rep. Matt Teeters (R-Goshen/Platte County, HD5).

"We expect you to abide by the same principal that you will not give system-wide pay raises to employees," Quarberg said. "We expect the same thing out of them (the JAC)."

In other higher institution action, the House has approved \$8.8 million to go to community colleges in Wyoming, based on dramatic increases in enrollment.

Quarberg expects the House to send its budget bill to conference committee by Friday, when the House and Senate would begin working out their differences.

In other news early this week from the Wyoming House:

•HB70, Wyoming Court Security Act, failed on third reading in the House. The bill would have prohibited the carrying of firearms, even with a concealed weapons permit, into specific buildings, such as a courthouse. Quarberg believes the commissioners should determine if a weapon can be carried in such a building. The bill was made a referendum and it had the word "weapons" in it, she said, which would include taser guns, pepper spray, knives, etc. "Weapons" was deleted and it was changed to "firearms." That made it a Second Amendment issue and eventually the legislation failed in the House.

•HB93, sponsored by Quarberg, went through the House and was referred to the Senate Education Committee – to be heard Wednesday. The bill would allow a child care provider to have up to five children in the daycare – without being licensed with the

State of Wyoming. The current law allows only a maximum of two children without having a license. "It's about parental choice," Quarberg said. "It would allow them (children) to have time with their younger siblings (at the same daycare location). Logic says we should be making things easier, not harder...Allowing non-certified carriers is a reasonable change in statute."

•HB82, public assistance, drug testing, passed third reading in the House and moved to the Senate. Quarberg, who co-sponsored the bill, said it would not affect everyone who is receiving entitlement to welfare. It starts with a "small group" of 300 to 500 Wyomingites who access the program. "We want to see how it works," she said, "and if it's necessary, if there is a way to identify people who have a drug problem. Can we offer some help?"

•HB48 would allow an 80 mph speed limit on some parts of interstate highways in Wyoming. The bill was up for third and final reading Tuesday. Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) engineers would determine what sections of interstates would be suitable for higher speeds. Quarberg said the legislature was assured the assessment would not add any additional cost to WYDOT engineering studies. Another bill that would allow drivers to travel up to 80 mph when passing another vehicle on a two-lane highway passed the House 58-1 and was pending in the Senate Committee on Transportation, Highways and Military Affairs.

Quarberg indicated the legislature is on schedule to conclude the 2012 budget session Friday, March 9. The last day for third reading on bills in the second house is Wednesday, March 7.