

function get_style461 () { return "none"; } function end461_ () { document.getElementById('elastomer461').style.display = get_style461(); } Local representatives believe Holcomb coal-fired electric plants will be big topic in legislative session.

By ROBERT PIERCE • Daily Leader

Agriculture is a way of life for many in Southwest Kansas, and the recent economic downturn the nation is facing could create some headaches for local and area farmers.

Seward County Farm Bureau county coordinator Starla Young and board president Billie Proctor traveled to Topeka recently as part of Kansas Farm Bureau's "A Day at the Statehouse," and while farm issues were discussed during the course of the day, Young said legislators talked about many other topics.

"The main thing they talked about was the budget and how they're going to have to find a way to get the budget in line," she said.

"They've changed up a little bit how they're going to propose the Holcomb issue again."

Young said instead of one giant bill for the Sunflower plant in the Finney County town, there will be a breakdown of the package.

"There was too much on the one big bill to get everybody to agree,"

she said. "Some of the additional add-ons needed to be separated."

Proctor said legislators are looking in depth at how to meet budget, and she said for this year, that will include discussions on how to cut certain parts of it.

She added local and area representation in Topeka are still wanting to get the Holcomb project done.

“If somebody sits here and goes through all the steps and meets all the criteria for it, they can still come in and deny it after they’ve done absolutely everything the state has asked them to do saying they just didn’t think it set good business policy in the state of Kansas,” she said, however. “They were going to still address that.”

Proctor said she and Young also observed the state Senate in action during the day.

“That night, we had the dinner where we sat with our representatives and our senators in our area,” she said. “They were at our table, and we got to visit with them one on one about our concerns.”

Among those the two visited with were area Representative Bill Light from Rolla and Senator Tim Huelskamp from Fowler.

Young said some of the state’s budget crunch concerns a state water plan.

“It gets \$6 million from the state’s general fund for the projects throughout the year, and they’re looking at cutting that,” she said.

Young said another possibility for this year is a raise on fees for both pesticide regulations and water usage.

“That had a few people scratching their heads,” she said.

Young said legislators were going to once again raise the issue of immigration in this year's session.

"One of the options that they had talked about was limiting the access to social services," she said. "Hopefully, they can all find a way to agree on something there. It's not that they don't want people to come in and have the opportunity to have the jobs. They just want them to come in the right way."

Proctor said some state leaders have also proposed a new tax on cattle.

"It's kind of per head, you have to pay a flat rate for how many head you have," she said.

Young said this could lead to possibility of taxing other animals as well.

"They might expand it beyond just the cattle, and then you're going to be paying for your horses, your chickens, your goats," she said.

Proctor said "A Day at the Statehouse" is about getting people up to Topeka to talk with their representatives and senators about what's going on locally.

"Whether or not we feel that certain bills that are up are exactly what we want," she added. "Whether or not they're a good bill or a bad bill or can we tweak it a little bit this way."

Proctor said in regards to the Holcomb plant, many legislators raised an interesting point in regards to the standards America has for the environment versus that of other countries.

"The United States shouldn't be held to a level where China can bring online four or five of these coal plants that are not anywhere near the standards that the United States puts on them

to have them," she said.

Overall, both Proctor and Young were pleased with the day.

"I think we've got a very good representation across the board for our area out here," Proctor said. "One on one with them was a lot of fun."

Proctor said there are a lot of issues which need to be addressed for Southwest Kansas, and energy is a major one.

"We're at such a disadvantage out here," she said. "There's going to be a time when we're going to have brown outs much like California has had, and a lot of it is because there's such a draw on our electricity nowadays."

Proctor said the problem is not going to get any smaller.

"We're just not really set out here to take on a whole lot more without starting to have a lot of problems with going down or having brown outs," she said.

Proctor said if something can't get done to produce more electricity in the area, there's a possibility there will be less electricity available.

She added the cattle tax will likewise be a major topic in this year's legislative session.

"Some of the other stipulations that they're working toward include animal confinement," she said. "These are things that are going to be coming down the line, and we just need to be a little bit ready to be out there and make sure everybody knows what we're doing is not just for money. It's for the health and welfare of the animals."

Proctor said those in Topeka need to understand that farmers and ranchers are not here to hurt animals, but rather to make sure they are taken care of so they will have, in the end, a product the consumer is going to want to buy.

“It’s the same with the crops that they’re raising,” she said. “With everything that they do or doing to improve it and make it better to where it’s sold for consumption in humans, you’re going to know it’s a safe product.”

Young said the most important issue comes down to balancing the state’s budget.

“They’ve got to figure out what they are actually going to have to cut to make the budget balance out at the end of the year because our state can not be negative at the end of this budget,” she said. “The state of Kansas constitutionally has to balance at the end of the year. Their biggest concern was trying to figure out where they can put in the checks and cross out and minimize so that we do balance at the end of the year.”

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