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SCHOOL TALK
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INSIDE TODAY'S PARSONS SUN

STATE NEWS

Battle brews over how to spend relief funds

TOPEKA (AP) — A big political battle is brewing over whether top Republicans in the GOP-controlled Legislature will have the final say over how the state spends more than \$4.8 billion it expects to receive from the latest federal COVID-19 relief package.

The move comes as elected officials voted Thursday to drop mask mandates in Johnson and Riley counties in coming days. The votes leave mask mandates in place in just two counties — Douglas in the Lawrence area and Wyandotte County in the Kansas City, Kansas, area. Masks have been part of an ongoing fight that has pitted Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly against the GOP-controlled Legislature.

Kelly this week vetoed a provision in a spending bill that would have required state agencies to have their proposals for spending relief dollars vetted by the joint Legislative Budget Committee and then approved by a council of the Legislature's top eight leaders. Six of those

See FUNDS, Page 10.

DEATHS

Obituaries or notices for the following people can be found on Page 2 in today's Sun:

- Clyde McGlory Jr.
- Jarold Head
- Ritter Whittley
- William Armstrong

FUNERALS

PATRICIA SIMMONS, 70, of rural Parsons, service at 10:30 a.m. Saturday at Galesburg United Methodist Church.

JOHN LIPS, 82, of Manhattan, service at 10 a.m. Monday at Bartlett Christian Church.

DUSTIN WATKINS, 41, of Parsons, service at 2 p.m. Friday at Edgmand Cemetery near Columbus.

BILLIE JO COLTRAIN, 70, of La Grange, Texas, service at 11:30 a.m. May 22 at First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Parsons.

THIS ISSUE:
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Colleen Williamson/Sun photo

Brown-Bishop Post No. 704 Commander Neil Hudson (left) and former Post Commander Jim Ewan look at old scrapbooks and the award they were given for the Veterans of Foreign Wars post being the first in Kansas to be honored for having been in operation for 100 consecutive years.

VFW post celebrates 100 years

Members hope younger veterans will join to keep tradition going

By Colleen Williamson
 cwilliamson@parsonssun.com

For 100 consecutive years Brown-Bishop Post No. 704, Veterans of Foreign Wars has contributed to helping veterans of foreign wars, their families and communities.

Members gathered this week, looking over scrapbooks and discussing the award they were given, being the only post in Kansas to receive the honor to date.

"There are other posts that are older, but they have not operated consecutively for 100 years," VFW 704 Commander Neil Hudson said.

The accomplishment is astounding amid the fact VFW posts across the state are rapidly diminishing in number as younger veterans do not step up to fill the positions of the World War

II and Korean War veterans who are dying daily.

"The bad thing about VFWs anymore is there were 23 posts in our district in 2012. Our district goes from the Oklahoma line to Fort Scott (and west) to Augusta. At this point we are down to 15, and there are about four that are going to drop out of that. We're going to be down to almost single digits," Hudson said. "There are seven districts in the state of Kansas now. There were nine. They've had to reorganize because of the decline."

"When I was commander, there were 177 posts in the state of Kansas," former Commander Jim Ewan said. "We are now down to 112 in the state," Henry Gatewood, another former commander, said.

"They are going fast," Hudson said, adding that many veterans of Vietnam, Afghanistan and other wars are not affiliating.

Oswego's VFW closed down as did Erie's, and Chetopa's post only has two members. Chanute and Pittsburg posts are on the verge of closure, too. As VFW posts close, some members move to another post still open. Some do not. Sometimes the posts are too

far away for some older veterans to participate. Passing the torch to the younger generation of veterans can't be done if they are not there and willing to accept the torch.

"I don't know what the big issue is and why they aren't affiliating. Maybe there are so many other things to do now than say 50-60 years ago, and they are just too busy," Hudson said. "I know several that have got kids, and how many things are kids involved in?"

It could be as some say that they can't afford the \$45 annual dues, or a lifetime membership fee that is based on age and can be paid in installments over 12 months.

Or perhaps, they said, part of the unwillingness of younger veterans to join is based on misconceptions that all older veterans do is sit around, smoke, drink and tell old war stories.

The veterans laughed, raising a cup of black coffee, saying that was about all they drink that's stout nowadays and they only have one member who smokes. While they do enjoy camaraderie and are there to support one another when needed, old war stories

See VFW, Page 10.

Kobach launches bid for Kansas attorney general

WICHITA (AP) — Polarizing conservative Kris Kobach launched a campaign Thursday for Kansas attorney general, attempting a political comeback in 2022 after losing nationally watched races for governor and U.S. Senate.

Kobach, a former Kansas secretary of state, built his political brand by advocating restrictive immigration policies and tough voter identification laws, including a prove-your-citizenship requirement for Kansas voters struck down by a federal appeals court last year. He also was the first prominent Kansas elected official to endorse Donald Trump for president in 2016 and was vice chair of a short-lived Trump commission on voter fraud.

He is grounding his latest campaign in promises to aggressively attack President Joe Biden's policies in court if elected. But he faces doubts among fellow Republicans about his electability, just as he did in 2020. He lost the Republican nomination for U.S. Senate that year to Roger Marshall after losing the 2018 governor's race to Democrat Laura Kelly.

Kobach also said past work as a University of Missouri-Kansas City law professor and with the U.S. Justice Department means the state attorney general's office "suits me ideally." The incumbent, Republican Derek Schmidt, is running for governor in 2022.

"Far and away the No. 1 reason why I am running is to stand between an overreaching Biden administration with unconstitutional and illegal



Jamie Willey/Sun file photo

Kris Kobach poses for a photo with two supporters following a Republican governor candidate forum in 2018 in Parsons.

executive orders and the people of Kansas," Kobach said in kicking off his campaign in Wichita, the state's largest city.

But the Kansas Chamber of Commerce, influential with Republicans, quickly expressed doubts about Kobach's legal skills.

Kansas could be on the hook for \$3.3 million in legal fees after the U.S. Supreme Court refused to review the appeals court ruling against the proof-of-citizenship law. During the lawsuit against the law, a federal magistrate accused Kobach of misleading the court and fined him \$1,000, and later, a federal

judge ordered him to complete six extra hours of legal education.

Kansas Chamber President and CEO Alan Cobb said businesses question whether Kobach could represent them and individuals effectively in court as attorney general.

"Kobach's candidacy puts too much at risk," Cobb said in a statement.

Kobach said Thursday that lower court rulings on the proof-of-citizenship law depended on which judges reviewed the case and that he's confident the U.S. Supreme Court would have upheld the law had it taken the case.

But his take-no-prisoners political style alienated moderate Republicans and independent voters in his 2018 race for governor and pushed some GOP conservatives to back Marshall in 2020.

"As Republicans, we want to win," said Kelly Arnold, a former state GOP chairman. "He has his work cut out for him to try to rally a support base."

Kobach's first move as a candidate for attorney general showed that he's still likely to polarize voters. He appointed a western Kansas GOP activist, Laura Tawater, as his campaign treasurer late Wednesday night.

She has faced criticism because she was in Washington on Jan. 6, the day a violent mob of Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol. Tawater posted pictures from Washington on Facebook and said on Jan. 7 that she would miss "so many freedom-loving Patriots."

Mask order could expire May 17

By Jamie Willey
 jwilley@parsonssun.com

The Parsons mask mandate is set to expire next month, and at least two city commissioners favor letting it run out instead of extending the ordinance.

The commissioners addressed the ordinance during a Thursday work session, and the issue might be placed on the agenda for Monday's regular meeting. However, the commissioners likely won't act on the ordinance on Monday.

"I just wanted to facilitate a discussion, use this as a springboard," Commissioner Jeff Perez said.

The ordinance, which was approved on July 6, mandates people to wear masks in buildings accessible to the public. The ordinance also requires businesses and organizations to post a notice at their entrances that masks must be worn inside. Employers also must make their workers wear masks when they are in areas accessible to the public or when they can't socially distance from each other.

The commission extended the ordinance three times on unanimous votes, most recently in February. The ordinance is now set to expire on May 17, and commissioners either oppose or are unsure about renewing it for a fourth time.

On Thursday, Commissioner Kevin Cruse said vaccinations are now available for anyone who wants them.

See MASKS, Page 10.

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