

## Patron tells of spike in taxes

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Friday, 14 September 2012 13:50 -

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**EDUCATION HEARING HERE**

The public is invited to a Nebraska legislative hearing Tuesday, Sept. 18, in the performing arts center. At 2 p.m., the Legislature's education committee will discuss:

- LR 488—An interim study to examine early childhood education programs in Nebraska.
- LR 492—An interim study to examine the system of financing public education in Nebraska.

When it comes to school funding, superintendent Dr. Mike Tealton noted that rural schools are losing representation by rural senators in the Unicameral who have been protective of not shifting financial responsibility to agricultural land. Both legislative resolutions are sponsored by the chair of the education committee, Sen. Greg Adams of York, who requested the hearing in Gothenburg. The committee is having similar hearings in Gering, Alliance and Gretna.

### School board passes \$11.2M budget

A 10.3% rise in valuation for Gothenburg is not all roses, according to one school patron.

Mary Lou Block, who ranches with her husband north of Gothenburg, said the Blocks' real estate taxes rose about 22% in both 2010 and 2011.

Block addressed the District 20 school board Monday night after a budget and tax hearing during the board's September meeting.

Much of the valuation, that increased nearly \$500,000 the past two years, is supported by what she describes as "out-of-sight" prices for agricultural land.

"It only gives us extra money if we decide to sell the it," Block said.

Block said she appreciates the hard work board members put into fashioning a conservative budget each year but asked that they consider the tax burden on property owners with ag land.

She noted that many farm and ranch families are struggling because of the drought which is the worst many old timers have ever seen.

Culling herds because of dried-up forage combined with "crazy land prices" is going to hit hard next year, Block said.

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Even though the levy doesn't change this year, she said many ag-land owners will pay more because of increased valuation.

"Be courageous and rein in spending," Block said.

Block was the only one from the public to speak after the hearings.

During the board's regular meeting, an \$11.2 million budget was passed as well as a tax request of \$6,194,333—a 10.6% increase over last year.

The special building fund receives \$323,232 and \$818,979 goes into the bond fund to help pay off construction of the new high school and other improvements.

Superintendent Dr. Mike Teahon noted that the last payment on the bonds will be in 2024.

With the new budget, the levy increases slightly, from 1.193 to 1.194 per \$100 of property valuation.

Teahon said the increase in valuation brings about concern for decreased state aid since disbursements are based on what communities can generate to pay for school operations.

Two high school softball players, Siera Schwanz and Hannah Wolf, asked the board to support a Pink-Out Night during a game against Cozad on Thursday, Sept. 27.

Team members will "swing for a cure" to fight breast cancer by selling T-shirts, bracelets and accepting donations at the gate.

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In other action, the board passed a resolution approving Gothenburg State Bank, First State Bank and Great Western Bank as depositories of district funds in 2012-2013.

During other business, the board:

learned that Weathercraft Roofing, who put a new roof on the Community Building, will replace part of a gym floor damaged during a summer rainstorm when precipitation came through sidewalls.

The east doors of the Community Building will be also be replaced for more security.

were told that school officials met with route drivers to talk about safely driving buses especially during harvest when visibility at county intersections is often obscured by corn.

heard that enrollment at Dudley Elementary has increased by five students—to 497 students and that Outdoor Education at the Doug and Stephanie Block farm will be on Sept. 28.

All-day kindergarten started on Sept. 4.

were informed that the school's safe schools plan has been reviewed and updated and includes a change of where students go during a tornado.

found out that a new high school tardy policy, implemented last year, has resulted in 16 fewer tardies this year.

discovered that a data day for teachers on Aug. 31 was helpful in learning how to analyze data

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to assist students in classes across the curriculum.

became aware that Gothenburg will host district events in softball, golf and in D2 volleyball.

were apprised that a part-time person, J.D. Riley, was hired to work in the school cafeteria.

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