



Sunny and mild Friday before spiking to 91 degrees on Saturday. **A2**



The O.J. saga
Who needs reality TV when there's O.J. Simpson to watch?, **A5**

Does size matter?
When it comes to dog agility, not really, **B1**

The Gillette NEWS-RECORD

SERVING GILLETTE SINCE 1904

COMING Sunday:

■ A lack of doctors sends people unnecessarily to the emergency room.

Vol. 103 No. 221 Thursday Evening, Sept. 20, 2007

Gillette, Wyoming 82716

50 cents (less by carrier)

Kiss those billion dollar surpluses goodbye

■ **Governor says Wyo. likely won't have surplus next year**

By MEAD GRUVER
Associated Press Writer

CHEYENNE — For the first time since 1999, the state might not have a surplus when the Legislature meets to approve the next two-year budget this winter.

Very low natural gas prices due to constricted pipeline capacity are taking a toll on state revenue compared to the past several years, Gov. Dave Freudenthal said Wednesday. "I don't believe that anyone should be expecting the kind of revenue in excess of projections, or what people call a surplus, this year," he said.

"It's going to be a good, solid budget. But the kind of revenues over projections that we've become accustomed to, it's not going to be there."

Freudenthal blamed the reduced revenue from royalties and severance taxes on the low prices Wyoming producers are getting for their gas. At western Wyoming's Opal Hub on Wednesday, gas on the spot market was selling for \$1.35, second-lowest in the nation and well below the \$6.25 price at Louisiana's benchmark Henry Hub, according to Intelligence Press.

The governor, who expects to release his proposed biennial budget in December, summed up the difference in one word. "Appalling," he said.

Wyoming had roughly a \$1.13 billion surplus heading into the 2006 budget session, a \$1.5 billion surplus in 2004 and a \$727 million surplus in 2002, according to Steve Sommers, budget and fiscal manager for the state Legislative Service Office.

Only about a fifth of Wyoming's gas is sold on the spot market. The rest is sold through contracts at prices lined up in advance. But the easily tracked spot prices are a barometer for

the natural gas market, and economists estimate that each 10-cent decrease in Wyoming's spot gas price costs the state \$23 million a biennium.

Freudenthal said prices are so low in part because companies drilling in western Wyoming are "victims of their own success."

"They're drilling and producing more gas than they can get out," he said.

Pipelines, he pointed out, are built based on production estimates. So when producers underestimate production, insufficient capacity persists. To get their gas to market amid tight pipeline capacity, companies become willing to sell at rock-bottom prices.

Help for Wyoming's revenues will arrive sometime late next year, when the Rockies Express Pipeline is expected to be completed connecting Colorado and Wyoming to the Midwest. But even that pipeline is expected to reach full capacity within a few years.

"The long-term fix is try to get companies to

subscribe to space in the pipelines so that pipeline companies will build them earlier," Freudenthal said.

A clear picture of Wyoming's budget will emerge with the next state Consensus Revenue Estimating Group report in October. One of the report's authors, state economist Jim Robinson, said there is at least some cause for revenue optimism.

He said this is a soft time of year for gas prices — after the summer air conditioning season but before the winter heating season.

"I don't think anyone is expecting prices to stay like this for very long," he said.

He predicted prices would nudge back upward in October, but not before taking a bite out of revenues.

Robinson said price differentials between gas hubs tend to shrink during periods of high demand, such as in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Prices then soared into the \$11 range — a boon for Wyoming.

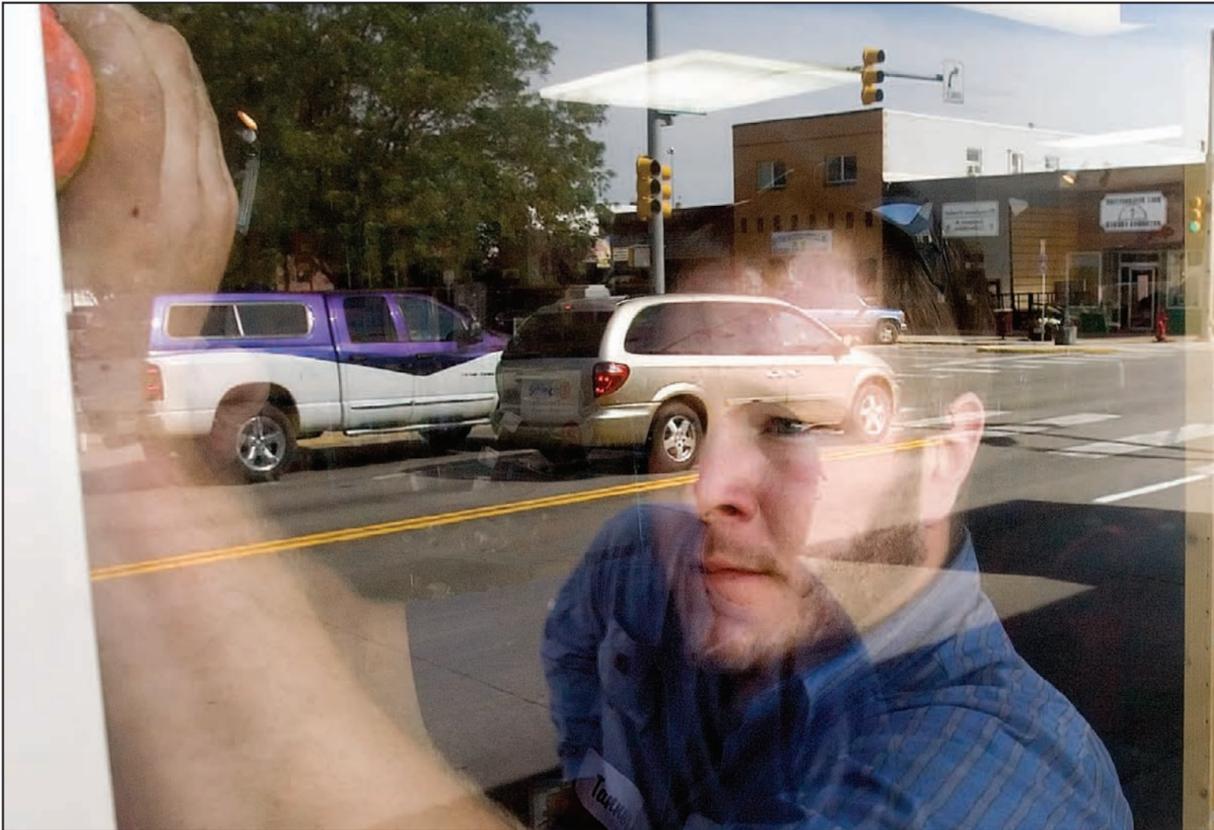


DAVE FREUDENTHAL
Drilling companies in Wyoming are "victims of their own success."

FIXER UPPER

Tanner Barnes caulks the edge of a window on the side of Teacher's Corner/Kids Mart on Wednesday afternoon while cars pass on Second Street. The window was found shattered in the morning and took a couple of hours for workers from Associated Glass to install new glass.

News-Record photo by Nathan Payne



Ga. man dies in Highway 59 rollover

By The News-Record staff

A 34-year-old Georgia man died in an SUV rollover Thursday morning about 15 miles south of Gillette, Highway Patrol Trooper Josh Undeberg said.

The man, whose identity is being withheld until officials can notify his family, was driving a Ford Explorer south on Highway 59 at about 6:10 a.m. with a 55-year-old passenger, Undeberg said.

For unknown reasons, the SUV drifted off to the right side of the road. The man overcorrected, and the Explorer went into the northbound lane, into a ditch and rolled.

The 34-year-old was thrown from the vehicle during the rollover and the SUV landed on him. Neither he nor the 55-year-old man, who also is from Georgia, were wearing seat belts.

The 55-year-old was taken to Campbell County Memorial Hospital after the wreck, but he was cleared to leave that same morning.

Separate high schools in Gillette gets some endorsement

■ **Planners suggest making South Campus its own school in 2014**

By CHRISTA MELAND
News-Record Writer

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Almost a dozen people indicated at a public forum that they favor the idea of making Campbell County High School South Campus into a 900-student stand-alone high school.

But how and when that idea should become a reality was debated Wednesday night at South Campus, where about 50 people showed up to give input about school facility plans to address future growth.

A representative from JGA, a Montana-based planning firm hired by the school district, presented a timeline that proposed an expansion and sep-

aration of South Campus in 2014 — but at least one community member wants it done sooner.

"If we're going to do two schools, why not do it now? Why are we waiting 'til 2014?" said Bill Rice, an eight-year former school board member.

He explained that when South Campus opened its doors in 1999 as a school that could accommodate 600 students, school trustees intended that it would eventually become a stand-alone high school. While its number would place it among division 3A schools for sports, the North Campus



BILL RICE
Former school trustee says South Campus was intended to be separate eventually.

school would remain in the 4A division so that the two wouldn't compete.

When asked why school trustees haven't explored the idea more thoroughly, Trustee Gregg Blikre said one concern is that there isn't space for technical education programs at South Campus.

"I know it's been a longtime argument," he said. "There's been a lot of good reasons both ways."

Kaiser Mock, a CCHS sophomore and one of the few students who attended the forum, said after the meeting that North Campus is crowded and he, too, would like to see the campuses become separate high schools. He thinks a major reason it hasn't happened yet is because people are concerned about how the split would affect sports.

"I don't think education and how we structure our schools should be based on how many state championships we can win in basketball," he said.

Several other topics also were discussed at the

forum:

■ **GROWTH PREDICTIONS:** Jim LaManna worries that the planning firm may have overestimated the anticipated future population growth, which it based in part on local building permits and new developments.

"I would think you'd want to base it on something like permanent new jobs instead of a developer's pipe dreams," he said.

While some recommendations are based on more than 50 percent student population growth by 2020, LaManna is unsure that there will really be that many more people by then.

"The people having kids right now aren't necessarily going to be living here in 13 years," he said. "They're here for temporary ... jobs now."

JGA's John Eisen acknowledged that it's possible that the firm has overestimated but assured people

See SCHOOLS on Page A6

Reid bill in Senate seeks to limit coal, push alternative energy



HARRY REID
Bill is being introduced in U.S. Senate.

By The Associated Press

CARSON CITY, Nev. — U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, stepping up efforts to block new coal-fired power plants in Nevada, is introducing a bill requiring most power transmitted over a proposed cross-state line to come from alternative energy sources.

Reid's measure would require Nevada-based Sierra Pacific Resources to ensure that 75 percent of the power transmitted over its planned high-voltage line comes from solar, wind, geothermal or other alternative energy sources.

If Sierra, parent of Reno-based Sierra Pacific Power Co. and Las Vegas-based Nevada

Power, didn't build the line, the bill by Reid, D-Nev., gives bonding authority to the Western Area Power Administration so it can do the job.

Sierra has estimated cost of the big power transmission line at nearly \$600 million. WAPA would have bonding authority of up to \$10 billion, under Reid's measure.

"Sen. Reid is very clear in his opposition to the coal-fired power plants but also realizes the need to replace them with something else," spokesman Jon Summers said Wednesday.

If Sierra decides not to build the line, Summers said WAPA could construct and control it "while at the same time promoting the renewable energy industry."

Reid recently came out against three coal-fired power plants proposed for eastern Nevada. Two are near Ely and the third is near Mesquite. Reid said the Ely-area projects alone would require millions of tons of coal a year that in turn would generate millions of tons of pollution.

Sierra Pacific, Sithe Global Power LLC in New York, LS Power in New Jersey and Dynegy Inc. in Texas are proposing the plants. Sierra Pacific and Sithe Global have separate projects while LS Power and Dynegy are developing the third project.

Reid's stance has drawn praise from environmental groups while representatives of the

companies planning the projects defend them as necessary given scheduled shutdowns of older plants and the explosive growth in the Southwest, especially in Las Vegas.

While Reid is fighting the coal-fired plants, the Nevada Environmental Commission has rejected a petition from seven environmental groups trying to stop the companies from constructing such plants unless they control carbon dioxide emissions.

Gov. Jim Gibbons has opposed the move by the environmental groups, saying it isn't fair to stop the plants when they already "have invested years and millions of dollars in facility design and the permitting process."

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