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Familiar faces chosen by local voters Tuesday

Romney helps Republicans statewide

BY DAVID LIAS

David.lias@plaintalk.net

Voters in Clay County decided Tuesday to return some familiar faces to county and legislative offices, while adding some new people to the mix.

In the two-person race for District 17 state senator, former State Rep. Tom Jones defeated challenger John S. Chicoine. Jones received 3,563 votes, and Jorgenson received 3,477.

In the race for two District 17 House seats, Republican Nancy Rasmussen and Democrat Ray Ring were elected with 3,576 votes and 3,226 votes respectively. Marion Sorlien received 3,052 votes.

In a five-person race for two Clay County Commission seats, incumbents Leo Powell and Raymond (Dusty) Passick and newcomer Travis Mockler garnered the most votes, with 2,123, 1,883 and 1,759 respectively to win.

They were the top vote-getters, defeating Ruth Bremer, who received 1,683 votes and Stanley Peterson, who received 705.

Republicans sweep state elections.

South Dakota Democrats started this year's campaign with high hopes, recruited seemingly strong candidates and ran hard-fought campaigns. But when the votes were finally counted, Republicans once again had swept the state's elections.

Republican Rep. Kusti Noem won the election Tuesday to a second term as South Dakota's lone member of the U.S. House,

turning back an aggressive challenge from Democrat Matt Varilek. Two GOP candidates held onto their seats on the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission, and Republicans kept their strong majorities in both chambers of the Legislature.

And Mitt Romney won South Dakota's three electoral votes, defeating President Barack Obama to continue the GOP's domination of presidential politics in the heavily Republican state. Obama, however, won the national election.

Top officials in both parties said Romney's win with 58 percent of the votes played a big role in the Republican successes in races further down the ballot.

"It makes it tough for the down-ballot candidates to have to outperform the top of the ticket by that much," South Dakota Democratic Party Chairman Ben Nesselhuf said.

South Dakota Republican Party Chairman Tim Rave said Republicans who were motivated to vote by their dislike of Obama also helped elect GOP candidates in other races.

Republicans Chris Nelson and Kristie Fiegen won new terms on the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission, meaning the GOP will continue to hold all three seats on the panel that regulates grain warehouses and natural gas, electric and telephone utilities. Nelson, a 48-year-old former secretary of state, defeated Democrat Nick Nemecek, 53, a farmer and former state lawmaker. Fiegen defeated Democratic challenger Matt McGovern, 40, a



The National Guard Armory in Vermillion, which doubled as a polling place for Tuesday's general election, saw a steady stream of foot traffic after 5 p.m. on Election Day as last minute voters cast their ballots. Voter turnout in Clay County was nearly 64 percent, trailing the statewide average which topped 69 percent. (Photo by David Lias)

Sioux Falls lawyer and grandson of former Sen. George McGovern.

Voters also rejected Gov. Dennis Daugaard's plan to give merit pay to teachers and a proposal to boost the state sales tax from 4 percent to 5 percent, with the extra money split between schools and Medicaid.

Voters reject sales tax hike
South Dakota voters have rejected a proposal to raise the state sales tax to provide more money for schools and the Medicaid program that provides health care to low-income people. A teachers union and a health

care organization collected signatures to put the proposal on the ballot after Gov. Dennis Daugaard and the Republican-dominated Legislature cut state funding last year for school districts and medical facilities that serve Medicaid patients. The measure would have

raised the state sales tax from 4 percent to 5 percent and was expected to raise an estimated \$180 million a year. Half would have gone to school districts and half to Medicaid.

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Cause of landfill fire remains a mystery

BY TRAVIS GULBRANDSON

travis.gulbrandson@plaintalk.net

The cause of last month's fire at the Vermillion Landfill is undetermined.

This was the consensus between five investigators, landfill manager Bob Iverson told members of the Vermillion City Council during a special meeting Monday.

The investigators also said the fire did not start due to faulty wiring, Iverson said.

According to City Manager John Prescott, the insurance company has not provided a total loss estimate yet, although City Finance Officer Mike Carlson said that based on historical costs, one estimate for the building and its contents is \$1.4 million.

"It's going to be a long process," Iverson said. "The insurance companies have HDR working on what it would cost to tear the building down ... and they're also working on what it would cost to replace the building and the bailer. They have another outfit doing the machinery."

Iverson said landfill workers go through the building each day to estimate how much personal property, including tools, was lost.

"We've got to write that down and figure out the cost of that, and then we'll turn it in to the insurance (company)," he said.

The fire occurred the



The baler building at the Vermillion Landfill stands charred after an early-morning fire Oct. 22. The cause of the fire is undetermined. (Photo by Travis Gulbrandson)

morning of Oct. 22, and was discovered by employees arriving to work.

"(The building) was just glowing red," Iverson said. Among the equipment lost in the fire were a small loader, a truck and the baler.

A 2011 CAT 938G wheel loader also was lost, but the council voted to replace it with a 2012 CAT 938K wheel loader at its meeting Monday night.

"It got so hot in there it just burned everything," Iverson said. "There's not too much left in salvage value of any of the equipment."

Many of the beams in the frame of the building reflect this, sagging and warping due to the intense heat.

"It really weakened the building," Iverson said. "The building inspector told us (not to) park anything around it, because high wind or a lot of snow could just bring it down."

The temperature also reduced the building's concrete floor to something resembling powdery white gravel.

"(It was so hot) it started popping," Iverson said. "It takes 2,000 degrees for concrete to start doing that. It was also helped along when they sprayed the water in. The cold water hit the concrete and made it pop, too. So it was an awful hot fire."

Holes were also cut in the roof by emergency personnel to let the smoke out, and another hole was made in the door to shoot water in.

Despite all the damage, it could have been worse, Iverson said.

"The propane tanks were probably around 20 feet from the building, so they were within a hotspot area, but they were being taken care of," he

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Coyoteopoly helps fill food pantry's shelves

BY TRAVIS GULBRANDSON

travis.gulbrandson@plaintalk.net

The Vermillion Food Pantry may be set for food through the end of the year, thanks to the annual Coyoteopoly Food Drive.

The drive - collection for which took place primarily on Oct. 27 - netted the pantry more than 5,000 food items and more than \$3,500 in monetary donations.

"I think you did a really nice job," Mary Berglin of the food pantry told two Coyoteopoly students this week. "You did well with your advertising, you made slips that said 'this is what we need' and you gave it to the schools, you publicized it."

"I don't know how much more we could've done," she said.

The week before collections took place, student volunteers went through Vermillion putting approximately 3,000 donation bags on doorknobs throughout the community.

The filled bags were then picked up the following Saturday.

"We could tell within the first hour and a half of kids bringing in bags that it was going to be a much bigger drive (than in previous years)," Berglin said. "In fact, we had so many bags on the floor we had to say, 'You can't put them there anymore.' ... It was getting too hard to walk."

Now the pantry has lots of rice, pasta, chunky soup, peanut butter, canned fruit and other products it didn't have before.

"It was great to see the community support we got," said Coyoteopoly CEO Jeff Heier.

Dave Peschong, VP of operations for Coyoteopoly, agreed. "It



New cans of food line the shelves at the Vermillion Food Pantry, thanks to a food drive sponsored by Coyoteopoly that took place last month. (Photo by Travis Gulbrandson)

was great to see the individual residents and businesses, how strong they responded to everything," he said. "There was definitely a need for it."

Berglin said the food pantry has served "almost 4,000 people now, and the year's not over yet."

By comparison, the pantry served 3,396 people overall last year.

"Most people think that our busiest time is January, February and March, but actually it's July, August and September," Berglin said. "But we had a 400 month in October. Four-hundred months just boggle my mind, because that's 400 people coming in. Some of them were 463. Those are all really big numbers to me."

"When I look back on newsletters ... we used to do 100 people in a month a few years ago," she said. "Then it crawled up to a few more, and a few more, and then all of a sudden we're doing 400 people."

This is even more mind-boggling to Berglin because there is another Clay County food pantry in Wakonda.

"I'm just thankful that (Coyoteopoly) did it, and they did such a good job," she said. "Because there were some years where it was not nearly as well-done."


Thanks are due in part to the approximately 100 students who took part in the overall campaign, Peschong said.

"It was a great response from the students," he said.

Businesses also stepped up to the plate, Heier added. For example, Maurice's had a drop-off box in their store, and gave a 30 percent discount to customers who brought more than three food items.


Berglin, Heier and Peschong also extended their thanks to the

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