

# Opinion

## Letter Drop

• Our Readers Sound Off

## Give the gift of life

To the Colby Free Press:

It's a new year, and what better way to start the new year than to do something miraculous!

We would like to encourage everyone to share their miracle of life and donate blood on Jan. 29, when the Colby Community will host an American Red Cross blood drive. The drive will be held at the Colby Comfort Inn from 7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

If you are in general good health, at least 17 years of age and weigh at least 110 pounds, we hope you will consider getting your new year off to a great start by giving the miracle of life. By giving a small amount of your time, you may be helping a cancer patient, a burn victim, someone needing surgery; someone needing the life-giving miracle a blood donation provides.

For more information about donating blood, how to volunteer, or to schedule an appointment, please call 1-800-GIVE-LIFE, or call one of us..

Thank you, and we hope to see you on the 29th!

**Jo Frahm 462-2082**  
**Jackie Stephens 462-8122**  
**Blood Drive Co-Chairs**  
**Colby**  
**(Letter #6)**

### About those letters . . .

The *Free Press* encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address. These are used for verification of the writer only. If, however, you want your address and telephone number to appear with your letter, please ask us to do so when you submit your letter, or include a note with your letter. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and length, and, likewise, reserve the right to reject letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive or libelous. You can expect your letter to appear in print within 24-48 hours of receipt. Letters to the *Free Press* allow readers to become engaged in public debate on topics they deem important. Please consider sharing your thoughts with the family of *Colby Free Press* readers. Thank you.

### Addresses of elected officials:

**U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts**, 302 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-4774  
**U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback**, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521  
**U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran**, 1519 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715  
**State Rep. Jim Morrison**, State Capitol Building Rm. 174-W, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: jmorriso@ink.org web:http://www.idir.net/~jmorriso/  
**State Sen. Stan Clark**, State Capitol Building Rm. 449-N, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7399 e mail:

## COLBY FREE PRESS

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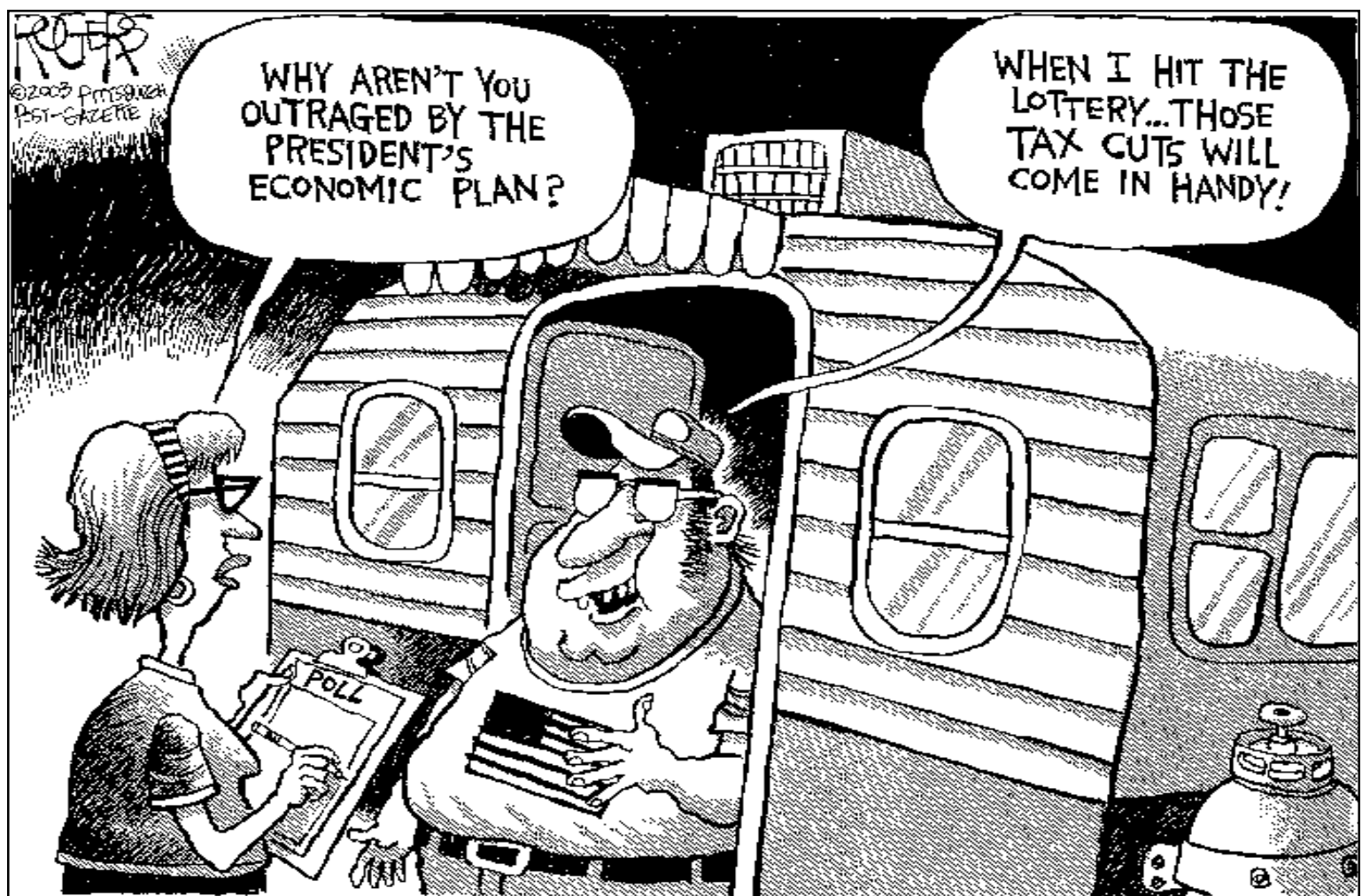
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## More than 'just' a sidewalk



Tom Dreiling

• My Turn

**TO MOST** of us it would just be another sidewalk. But to some others, it isn't. It has special meaning. I had never given thought to what a sidewalk could be other than a sidewalk until I received the following hand-delivered letter on Thursday morning. I won't go into any other explanation. I will let the letter do that.

It says:

Attn: Tom Dreiling  
 To: Citizens Medical Center Staff, Board and Citizens of Colby.

I would like to thank anybody and everybody for the public sidewalk that is located from the intersection of College and Franklin to the hospital. Last spring and this summer, I made 3 weekly trips to the hospital for therapy, lab work or lunch with my friends in my wheelchair. I enjoyed the walking trips over to get fresh air and exercise my personal assistants; however, with no access for my chair to cross the intersection it put me in the way of traffic. I did not enjoy "jay rolling" or the unsafe environment for others.

In April of 2002, we asked the city and hospital if it could be possible for a sidewalk to be constructed to access the hospital in a safe manner. Throughout the summer we checked on any progress that was being made. We also checked the ADA requirements for accessibility. We found that it was not mandated by the ADA for the hospital to build the sidewalk.

With the commitment of Citizens Medical Center to better serve their patrons, they began taking bids for the project in October of 2002. In December the foundation had been laid out for a new public sidewalk that suited all accessibility needs for persons using wheelchairs. Now, in January, the sidewalk and curb cuts have been constructed and are available for use by anyone.

To some this may be "just" a sidewalk, but to me it means so much more. This is another step for me to gain my independence and be part of my community. Special thanks to Michael Boyles, Kevan Trenkle, Floyd Moore, Gerry Bieker and Carolyn Armstrong, and last but not least the contractors for all their help. Without you this would not have been possible. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

The letter was signed by Thomas McCurdy, Colby, and co-signed by Anne Rinehart.

I guess it wasn't "just" a sidewalk. Nice.

### HAPPY Birthday to...

**Jan. 17** — Jeffrey Fellhoelter, Ken Brewer, Duane Unger  
**Jan. 18** — Pam Augustine  
**Jan. 19** — Judy Luedke, Nathan Quagliano, Mike McVay, Talon Grover  
**Jan. 20** — Corky Delzeit, Melissa Brown  
**Jan. 21** — Dennis Allison  
 Congratulations!

Call us at 462-3963 or email td@nwkansas.com to have your special day mentioned. If you don't see your name, please give me a call and I will put it into the computer. And *please* keep us advised of any changes. Many thanks for your help!

**THERE** is the story about the guy who was cleaning out his grandmother's house and came across a Royal Crown Cola bottle. The cap of the bottle was punctured with a bunch of holes. First thought coming to mind was it was used as a salt shaker. But nothing could be further from its actual purpose. It was a bottle that many years ago you would see sitting on the end of an ironing board to sprinkle clothes with. Steam irons were not a part of life in those years. If you can remember those bottles with punctured caps that means you've celebrated a lot of birthdays. Thanks to Fred and Larry, both submitting differing versions of the story.

**NOW** there is talk that Saudi Arabia might embark on some sort of coup designed to overthrow Iraq's Saddam "insane" Hussein before the United States and its allies invade. They fear an all-out invasion by the United States could throw

the entire region into such a state of chaos that it could end up being the bloodiest of all wars with a death toll unmatched.

**AND** those opposed to an Iraqi war are slowly but surely mounting protests all across our land, with a giant protest scheduled this weekend in Washington, D. C. It smacks of the days of the Vietnam war.

**THE** weatherpeople had us all excited earlier in the week when they were calling for 30 percent to 60 percent chances for snow in our neck of the woods. But that never materialized. All we got was wind and cold temperatures. Warmer weather is now the forecast with another "chance" for some snow by mid-week next week. But mid-week next week in the forecasting field is a long way off. Don't bet the farm on it. Maybe we need to quit doing rain dances and start doing snow dances. Maybe.

**THE** wedding day was fast approaching. Everything was ready, and nothing could dampen the bride's excitement, not even her parents' nasty divorce. Her mother had finally found the perfect dress to wear and would be the best dressed mother of the bride ever. A week later, the bride was horrified to learn her new young stepmother had purchased the same dress. She asked the young stepmother to exchange the dress, but she refused. "Absolutely not! I'm going to wear this dress; I'll look like a million in it!" The bride told her mother, who graciously replied, "Never mind dear. I'll get another dress; after all it's your special day, not hers." Two weeks later, another dress was finally found by the bride's mother. When they stopped for lunch, the bride asked her mother, "What are you going to do with the first dress? Maybe you should return it. You don't have any place to wear it." Her mother grinned and replied, "Of course, I do, dear! I'm wearing it to the rehearsal dinner!"

**HAVE** a good evening and a good weekend!  
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*Dreiling is publisher of the Free Press. His column appears Wednesdays and Fridays. td@nwkansas.com.*

## Rolling the dice on our health

Holly Sklar

• Another Take

Imagine if the first people infected in a smallpox attack had no health insurance and delayed seeking care for their flu-like symptoms.

The odds are high: Pick a number from one to six. Would you bet your life on a roll of the dice? Would you play Russian Roulette with one bullet in a six-chamber gun?

One in six Americans under age 65 has no health insurance. The uninsured are more likely to delay seeking medical care, go to work sick for fear of losing their jobs, seek care at overcrowded emergency rooms and clinics, and be poorly diagnosed and treated.

The longer smallpox — or another contagious disease — goes undiagnosed, the more it will spread, with the insured and uninsured infecting each other.

Healthcare is literally a matter of life and death. Yet, more than 41 million Americans have no health insurance of any kind, public or private. The uninsured rate was 14.6 percent in 2001 — up 13 percent since 1987. The rate is on the rise with increased healthcare costs, unemployment, and cutbacks in Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

One in four people with household incomes less than \$25,000 is uninsured. One in six full-time workers is uninsured, including half the full-time workers with incomes below the official poverty line.

The share of workers covered by employment health plans drops from 81 percent in the top fifth of wage earners to 68 percent in the middle fifth to 33 percent in the lowest fifth, according to the Economic Policy Institute.

As reports by the American College of Physicians, Kaiser Family Foundation and many others have shown, lack of health insurance is associated with lack of preventive care and substandard treatment inside and outside the hospital.

The uninsured are at much higher risk for chronic disease and disability, and have a 25 percent greater chance of dying (adjusting for physical, economic and behavioral factors).

To make matters worse, a health crisis is often an economic crisis. "Medical bills are a factor in nearly half of all personal bankruptcy filings," reports the National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine.

The United States is No. 1 in healthcare spending per capita, but No. 34 — tied with Malaysia — when it comes to child mortality rates under age five.

The United States is No. 1 in healthcare spending, but the only major industrialized nation not to provide some form of universal coverage.

We squander billions of dollars in the red tape of myriad healthcare eligibility regulations, forms and procedures, and second-guessing of doctors by insurance gatekeepers trained in cost cutting, not medicine. Americans go to Canada for cheaper prices on prescription drugs made by U.S. pharmaceutical companies with U.S. taxpayer subsidies.

While millions go without healthcare, top health company executives rake in the dough. A report by Families USA found that the highest-paid health plan executives in ten companies received average compensation of \$11.7 million in 2000, not counting unexercised stock options

worth tens of millions more.

The saying, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," couldn't be truer when it comes to health care. Yet, we provide universal coverage for seniors through Medicare, but not for children. We have economic disincentives for timely diagnosis and treatment of diseases.

Universal healthcare is a humane and cost-effective solution to the growing healthcare crisis. Universal coverage won't come easy, but neither did Social Security or Medicare, which now serves one in seven Americans. Many proposals for universal healthcare build on the foundation of "Medicare for All," albeit an improved Medicare adequately serving seniors and younger people alike.

Health care is as essential to equal opportunity as public education and as essential to public safety as police and fire protection. If your neighbor's house were burning, would you want 911 operators to ask for their fire insurance card number before sending — or not sending — fire trucks?

Healthcare ranked second behind terrorism and national security as the most critical issue for the nation in the 2002 Health Confidence Survey, released by the Employee Benefit Research Institute.

The government thinks the smallpox threat is serious enough to start inoculating military and medical personnel with a highly risky vaccine. It's time to stop delaying universal health care, which will save lives everyday while boosting our readiness for any bioterror attack.

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