

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Debate over flu shots somewhat confusing

A report coming out of Chicago earlier this week probably has most of America's senior citizens shaking their heads. It has to do with flu shots. National Institutes of Health researchers are challenging the standard government drumbeat that senior citizens get flu shots. The researchers suggest that practice has not saved any lives. The study's lead author, Lone Simonsen, a senior epidemiologist at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said, "There is a sense that we're all going to die if we don't get the flu shot. Maybe that's a little much."

Simonsen said that perhaps by expanding vaccinations to school children — the biggest spreaders of the flu virus — the elderly would be protected without flu shots.

Of course the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta said it plans no change in its advice on who should get flu shots, contending the National Institutes of Health research isn't enough to shift gears.

"We think the best way to help the elderly is to vaccinate them," said the Center's epidemiologist William Thompson.

Chiming in on the debate is Ira Longini, a biostatistics professor at Emory University's Rollins School of Public Health. He said the flu vaccine is less effective in the elderly than in younger people.

While he says it is smart for senior citizens to get their yearly flu shots because it can decrease their risk of getting sick, that a smarter government strategy would emphasize shots for children, ages 5-18. His statistical models show that strategy could save more elderly Americans from hospital visits and death.

Statistics further show that for the average senior citizen, the annual risk of dying from the flu is low — about 1 in 1,000. Regardless, all agree that senior citizens are still urged to get flu shots, but they shouldn't panic if vaccine isn't available. Best advice we can give? Listen to what your doctor says.

Tom (TD) Dreiling

Free Press Publisher

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail td@nwkansas.com.

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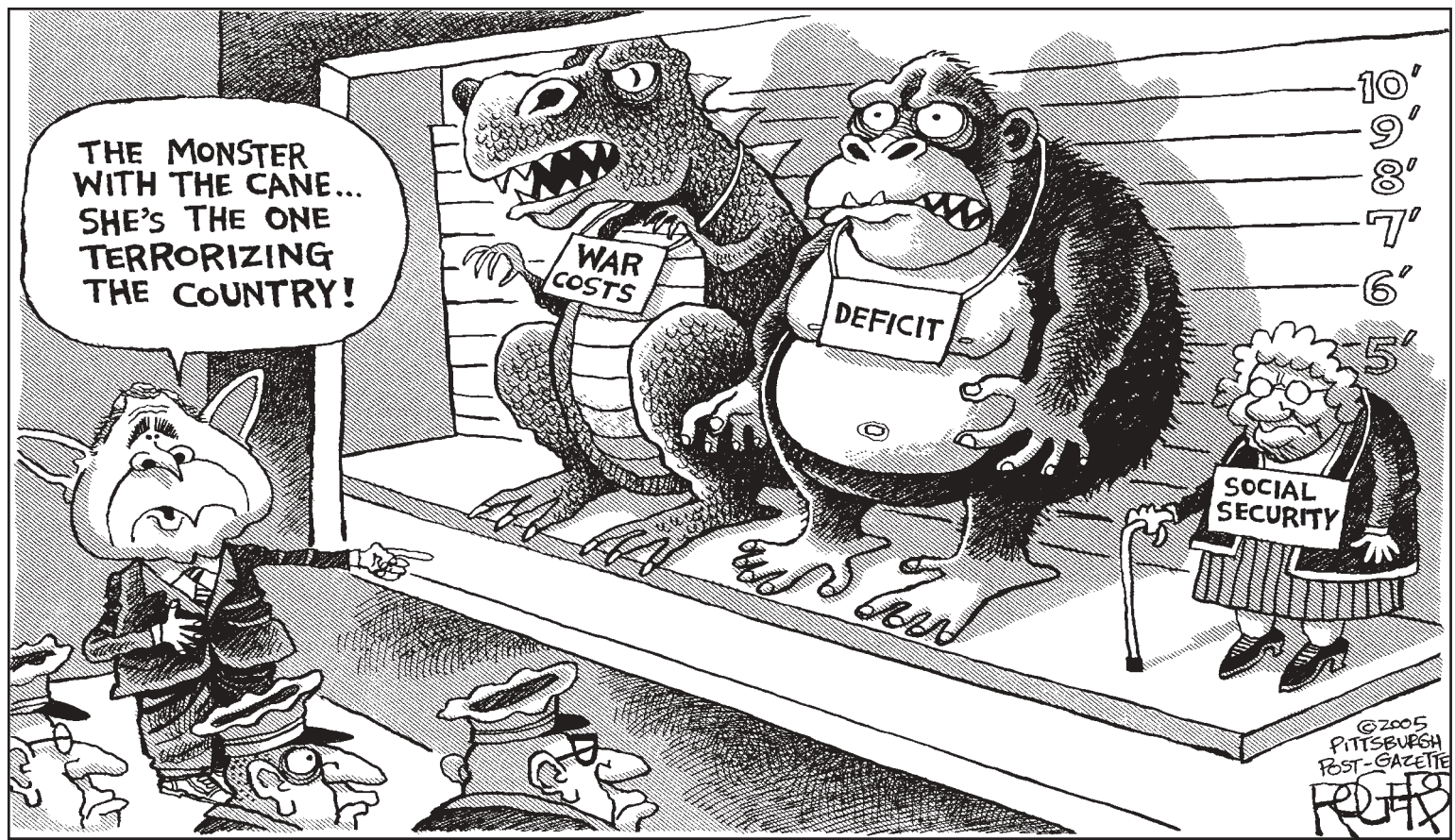
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Special people need special treatment

VALENTINE'S Day is over. The chocolates, the flowers, the gifts of all kinds are in the hands (or stomachs if we are talking chocolate) of the intended. All's right with the world. Love, harmony, unity — Valentine's Day was made for those very reasons. Wouldn't it be nice if that were the temperament all year long? I bought the seven ladies in my office each a box of chocolates, a little gift and a card to thank them for what they do to further our cause as the community's newspaper. No matter how often we might thank those whom we supervise, we also recognize the fact there are occasions when something extra is appropriate. Valentine's Day is one of those occasions. And while the recipients were pleasantly surprised to find the gifts at their desks, it also was a source of satisfaction for me to have thanked them in this way.

And all of this made the first day of the work week — Monday — all that more tolerable.

I WAS one of the recipients of an email on Monday from Fred Miller of our town concerning the status of their daughter Kristin. In part he writes:

I know many of you have not heard any word about Kristin since I e-mailed you last Thursday that she was experiencing system shut down and was on her way to Salina to have her baby.

The baby was delivered around 6 p.m. Thursday. A little girl. She weighed in at 2 pounds 10 ounces. 13 inches long. Dark hair. Named Jada Samette. Jada means "Jewel." Samette is a derivative of Samuel meaning "Prayed for from God" The "Little Jewel Prayed for from God" was breathing on her own as soon as she was born. The medical team that was assembled for Kristin and Jada was delighted at the great way both baby and Mom made it through the procedure.

After Kristin and Jason were able to touch her



Tom Dreiling

My Turn

and fondle her a bit she was transported by ambulance to Wichita for special care. She is doing "VERY WELL!" They say she is an incredible fighter!

I visited with Kristin Monday afternoon and she was sitting up in bed looking great, laughing, smiling, full of bounce and talking about maybe taking a leave of absence on Tuesday to go see her baby in Wichita. All tests seem to be coming back with improvements each time. The pain is all but gone. You are wonderful people. Thank you for praying! Please don't stop! God is doing a great thing and you are part of it!

VERY interesting is the only comment I have at this time as to the responses so far to Question #10: "In what northwest Kansas town will you find things that remind you of at least six different states?" You still have time to get your answer in. The winner receives free movie tickets. Email me at td@nwkansas.com, fax me at 462-7749, call me at 462-3963 or drop by the office at 155 W. 5th. Need your answer by late Thursday afternoon. Good luck!

I WATCHED the Grammy Awards Show earlier in the week. I wasn't impressed. I never get excited about these kinds of shows that hand out trophies for artistic achievement. The Oscars wait in the wings and while I will watch I will generally yawn wondering when it will end. The

only persons they haven't recognized with an Oscar over the many years of this sometimes overly rated event, are the "Best Ticket Counter Salesperson in a Supporting Role" and the "Best Employer of the Best Ticket Counter Salesperson in a Leading Role." Oops, they have also forgotten to Oscar the "Best Theater Door Unlocker." After all, if the doors aren't opened, the movies aren't seen and the Oscars have no purpose. But the glitter and glamour — and sometimes inappropriate dress and inappropriate language — of those showered with honors seems to attract enough viewers to continue its existence.

DID you see who the Democrats turned to as their party leader? Howard Dean! Yes, the Howard Dean of scream fame. The guy the party dumped during the primary election. They now have bagged him to point the party in the winning direction. Winning direction? I find that almost insulting. Dean was one of eight candidates for the post and while watching C-Span's coverage of one of the meetings at which all eight gave presentations, I thought surely they had some surprise candidates waiting in the wings. But they didn't. I will give Mr. Dean the benefit of the doubt. But at this point I am doubting he will be of any benefit. We'll see. Stranger things have happened — in the world of politics.

IT WILL be interesting to see how the two 'H's' mix as we move toward the election of 2008. Of course the two 'H's' are Howard and Hillary.

HAVE a good evening!

Tom Dreiling is publisher of the Free Press. His column appears Wednesdays and Fridays. td@nwkansas.com.

Shame on newspaper, sheriff

Your Views Count

Letters

To the Colby Free Press:

I had to take a quick trip to Golden, Colo., to pick up my grandson and just now got to read Thursday's Colby Free Press.

The front page news story, covering the recent accident that took one of our community's young men, was very inappropriate. Neither the reporter nor the sheriff used appropriate restraint in that article. I certainly am not denying freedom of the press, but that report had insinuations that, seemingly, were very premature.

The sheriff and reporter are both old enough and have both had enough professional experience to have known better. You can never take back inappropriate words, once they are spoken. Apologies will not erase the pain and suffering caused by hasty words. Nearly a week after the event, our sheriff should not be relying on hearsay. That's how the legal system and court would consider his remarks, if he made them that way in court.

I agree with our sheriff, we need to be much more concerned about the availability of alcohol to underage persons. However, making statements like what I read in Thursday's paper were very serious and out of line. If he was not the investigating officer, why didn't he refer the reporter to that officer? Was alcohol a contributing factor or wasn't it? Neither the investigating officer nor the sheriff should have been making such insinuations until that fact was established.

Something needs to happen

To the Colby Free Press:

After a lifetime of watching Kansas public schools increasing in size and decreasing in numbers with classroom numbers doing likewise, there has been a great train wreck. In a nutshell, the result has ended up putting the Kansas Supreme Court in the position of getting involved in the Legislature's responsibility of financing our public schools.

Using taxpayers' money, two of the participating districts responsible for the above Court actions were Salina and Dodge City. Those superintendents and others filed the case in (Judge) Bullock's District Court, an activist judge brave enough to say that school spending for the state's grade and high schools should be increased maybe as much as a billion dollars.

Was it bravery or was it an act of political opportunism? Did the defense prepare their side properly, etc? Legitimate questions, as the High Court of Kansas mulled over the case for many months. Once

more the topic of school spending became the chief political issue in the November 2004 election.

So — there are some things wrong with our public schools. Two courts have agreed there are.

Is amount of money the problem? Here are a few factual quotes from Representative, now Senator, Ralph Ostmeyer's (of Grinnell) final flyer before the November 2004 election:

"The Problem?"

"Kansans have always made their kids a top priority. Currently over 65 percent of our state General Fund goes to education."

"Accountability creates opportunity."

"Kansas Government can and must continue to make Education a Top-Priority. However, for the sake of our kids and Kansas Taxpayers, we must ensure that the money is spent more efficiently and wisely."

"With over 40 percent of every education dollar being spent on non-classroom expenses, Kansas

must do a better job of getting our dollars where they count in the classroom. As much as \$124 million in additional classroom resources would be available if we did a better job of managing our resources and holding down overhead."

"Less than 60 cents of every education dollar is spent in the classroom."

End quote.

Locally USD 315, Colby Junior College, Summers Township, Thomas County Courthouse tax dollars, both schools' combined share was 62 percent on property tax in 2004.

With these percentage figures in hand the Legislature wisely requested that Dale Dennis, longtime engineer of the Department of Education, furnish them with certain facts and proofs.

On Sunday afternoon Feb. 6, 2005, Smokyhill Public Television aired the issue with Dale Goter as moderator. Guests were (Republican) House Speaker Representative

Was speed a contributing factor? Unless the investigating officer had considered accepted interpretation of skid marks or other indicators, they should not have been reporting such "possible" causes in the front page story. Speed may well have been a contributing factor. However, one of my sons flipped our Ford Bronco end over end (literally) in a plowed field one time, and I can assure you he probably wasn't going over 35 miles per hour. The fact is, if you lose control of your automobile at 5 miles per hour, you were going too fast.

I surely hope our new sheriff and new reporter will think twice, the next time, before releasing unreliable and non-verified evidence to support front page headlines.

My heart goes out to the family, regardless of circumstance or cause of their loss.

Ken Poland
Gem
(Letter #5)

May, and Senate Minority Leader, Senator Hensley (Democrat). The subject for discussion was: "Can the Legislature meet the Court's April Deadline to solve the Problem?" After much gently goading by the moderator, Speaker May would each time reply, "Yes they did have the information from the (55 ??) schools requested but the facts were not substantiated."

Again the question, "You mean you can't get — well — whose — responsibility is it — ?" Almost simultaneously each other said to each other "Dale Dennis" in almost a hushed voice. Maybe, just maybe there is hope. We now know that there is little, if any accountability. When Enron's stockholders learned they could no longer trust their auditors, the truth began to surface.

Sooner than later let's hope that something begins to happen for the Taxpayers of the State of Kansas.

Lloyd Theimer
Colby
(Letter #6)