



## Free Press Viewpoints

### Is it an epidemic or 'crying wolf'?

Like the boy who cried wolf, the epidemiologists may have spoken one time too many.

Since they learned how to decode virus DNA, the disease experts have been predicting the next "Big One" every other year for a couple of decades.

Each mutation of the influenza genetic code has been heralded as the progenitor of the next 1918-style outbreak.

A couple of years ago, it was the Asian bird flu that would sweep the world with deadly effect. The forces of the medical world mobilized, but nothing happened. The new strain just seemed to fade away.

Before that, half a dozen others. At the same time, new strains of equine encephalitis (including the West Nile virus) were said to be poised to produce the next great mosquito-borne plague. That never happened, either.

And unless you happened to know one of the unfortunates who fell victim to West Nile (and some of us did), the virus passed without so much as a ripple.

It's not that epidemiologists are not good people trying to perform a public service. They fear the worst, and in their business, the worst could be very bad indeed. The 1918 "Spanish" influenza outbreak sickened as many as 50 million people worldwide and killed millions. It seemed to have been the result of a "perfect storm" involving a newly mutated virus, a world population with few immunities and a time when global travel was on the rise.

Today, of course, with round-the-world airline service, a commonplace, disease can move as quickly as we can. The latest "swine flu" has hopped continents more quickly than its predecessors ever could have. It truly had wings.

There are several other truths about this situation:

- The advice the disease control people give us is elementary: wash your hands, stay out of crowds, stay home if you are sick. It's the same thing we hear every year when cold and flu season approaches. Good counsel, but minimally effective against an epidemic.

- Drugs and other treatments offer little comfort beyond "take two aspirin and call me in the morning." There's not much medical science can do to lessen the impact of a virus once contracted, even today.

- This kind of panic involves a self-fulfilling prophesy. The epidemiologists will keep predicting the next "Big One" until it actually comes. Then they will tell us, "See. We were right all along."

The Cassandras who predict earthquakes to ruin California operate on the same principle, and history and science tell us they, too, will be "right" one day.

- The danger and cost of overreacting could be as great – or greater – than the actual danger of the flu. Closed businesses and schools have cost the world economy billions already. Nations such as Mexico that can ill afford the setbacks.

The jury is still out on this mutation. When it did not spread as fast or as far as predicted, "experts" noted that the 1918 outbreak "summered over" before it blossomed into a true killer the next winter.

That might happen again. It might not.

Whatever comes this time, the Chicken Littles of Atlanta and New York will be on the parapet, crying out the danger. Some day, their most dire predictions may even come true.

Meantime, go wash your hands again.

– Steve Haynes

### COLBY FREE PRESS

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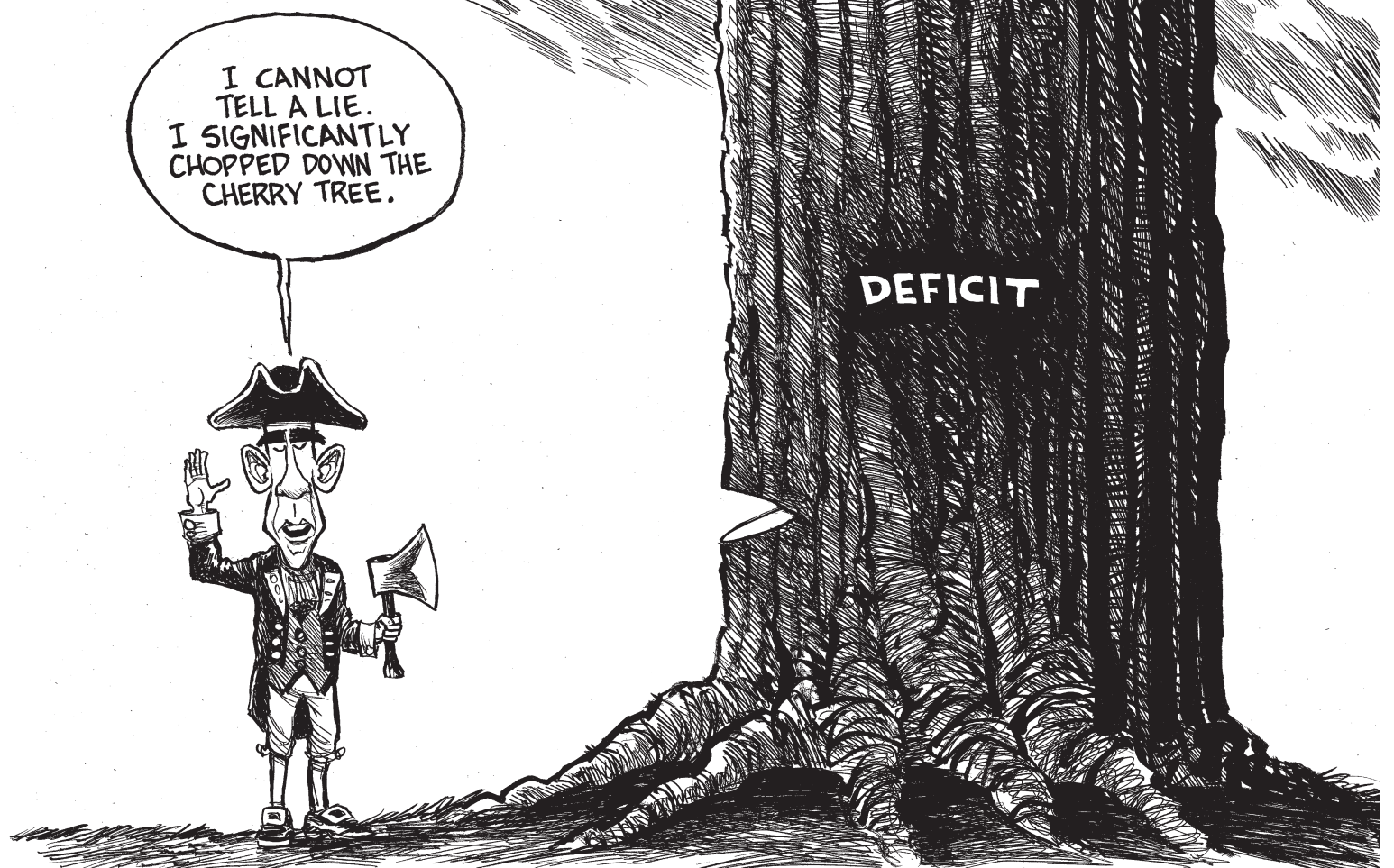
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### Limping along brings back Mom's story

I've been limping around for a couple of weeks.

I came up with a corn on my little toe about three weeks ago. At first I thought I had just cut the nail too close, and it would be OK in a couple of days. By after a couple of days, the toe was still sore and there was a hard place right beside the nail.

Dang, a corn. I hadn't had a corn in 20 years, and I'm not happy about this one — but then who ever is happy about sore feet?

I went to visit Dr. Scholl and bought some medicine. It's just a small bandage with a spot of salicylic acid on it. The salicylic acid eats away the corn — and just about anything else it touches.

I remember using something similar the last time I had this problem. The acid ate away at the corn and it fell out, leaving me with a hole in my foot. I was less than ecstatic about that, but the hole healed and the corn didn't return.

This time, I put the little bandage as closely over the corn as possible and took off. Each



Cynthia Haynes

#### • Open Season

one lasts two days, then you have to change it.

Yuck.

Where the acid is, it leaves dead white skin. My toe looks like it's been in water for about five years. And of course, the skin around the corn is affected as well. All in all, the cure is almost as bad as the disease, but hopefully won't hurt as bad.

As I limp around with my sore toe, however, it brings back memories of a story my mother told me.

She was in college in Arkansas and her girl friends talked her into going to a dance with

them, even though she had just had surgery on one of her toes.

It was during World War II, and the dance was full of young soldiers.

One young man in particular would not take no for an answer and repeatedly asked her to dance.

She says she remembers thinking to herself, "Soldier boy, if you step on my toe, it will be the last thing you ever do."

Apparently, he didn't, because they were still dancing 40 some years later.

Daddy's gone now, and Mom's in a wheelchair, but my sore toe doesn't seem nearly as achy when I remember how they met.

However, I still hope Dr. Scholl does his magic, because I got some dancing of my own to do.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

### Legislature winds up the session

The Kansas Legislature has wrapped up its work for the 2009 Session. Last week we completed the state's Fiscal Year 2010 budget beginning July 1st and passed the Kansas Comprehensive Energy Bill Governor Parkinson has committed to sign into law.

#### Budget

We completed the Omnibus budget bill last week. With the budget shortfall, our options were either more spending cuts or raising taxes. The Senate-passed version spent about \$61 million more than expected revenues. The House voted 64-60 to accept the Senate's Omnibus budget. I voted no for several reasons.

First, the House Appropriations Committee had an Omnibus Budget bill that we were scheduled to debate the same day of this vote. A yes vote silenced our chamber and my constituents.

I also voted no because I had not had an opportunity to read the Senate's Omnibus budget. During debate on the motion I did learn that compared to the House Appropriations' Bill, the Senate's bill:

- Made deeper cuts to public safety services and forced the closure of several correction facilities and programs.
- Made further cuts to funding for disabilities waivers.
- Cut the Judiciary Budget by 10.75 percent which will result in furloughs and layoffs of state employees.

- Broke the promise to cities and counties to pay the business machinery and equipment property tax slider revenue which will force local governments to raise taxes.
- Authorized an additional \$38 million in bonding for the Statehouse renovation.

And my biggest concern — the Senate's plan didn't balance the state budget but left a bigger hole to fill. Raising the tax burden does not solve our spending problem. Instead we should have considered more cuts. The Senate's budget is not responsible public policy.

Unfortunately, the House's vote happened because some lawmakers wanted to speed up the legislative process instead of rolling up their sleeves and solving our state's financial crisis. This makes me concerned about how they will approach the budget next session and the near-



Jim Morrison

#### • Capitol Review

ly \$600 million shortfall already predicted.

#### Balancing the Budget

The Omnibus Bill approved by the Legislature left a \$61 million dollar gap between spending and predicted revenues. Both chambers' tax committees considered a variety of bills that would either raise taxes or reduce available tax credits to increase the state's revenues. In the end, the Legislature agreed to a combination of items.

Senate Substitute for HB 2365 raises:

- \$35 million through an "Amnesty Tax Program" allowing the state to settle tax cases on appeal;
- \$3 million from reducing the statute of limitation to claim income tax refunds from three years to one;
- \$9.2 million from a 10 percent cut on a series of tax credits for two years;
- \$13.7 million from reducing the statute of limitation on sales tax and use tax refunds from three years to one;
- \$2 million from suspending the film tax credit for two years.

I voted against the tax package. I consider it a tax increase. Now is not the time to increase the tax burden. Thousands of Kansans have lost their jobs. I believe the state must live within its means by reducing spending.

#### Legislature Passes Energy Plan

The Kansas Legislature again passed a comprehensive energy bill — but this time, the Governor is committed to sign it into law. The plan includes allowing Sunflower Electric to build a new coal plant near Holcomb. This came through an agreement Sunflower made with Governor Parkinson. He wanted legislation to increase the production and use of renewable energies and realized the Legislature would never agree unless he let Sunflower provided affordable energy to its 500,000 consumer-owners. The compromise allows the elec-

tric co-op to build one 895 megawatt plant. Among its commitments, Sunflower also will build 179 megawatts of wind energy facilities; develop two 345-kilovolt transmission lines to meet the western energy grid, and develop a bio-digester to capture methane and an algae reactor. You can read more about Sunflower's plan at [www.holcombstation.coop/](http://www.holcombstation.coop/). Passage of the plan means 1500 new construction jobs and hundreds of permanent jobs, and re-establishes regulatory certainty and fairness in Kansas.

#### Wind Turbine Plant Coming to Kansas

One energy company is already taking advantage of legislation passed this session. Siemens Energy announced it will build a wind turbine manufacturing plant in Hutchinson. SB 108 allows wind or solar energy manufacturing businesses to qualify for \$5 million in bonds. The plant will be a 300,000 square foot, \$50 million facility that will eventually employ 400 people. It will build nacelles, the structures that house the turbine components that generate electricity, including the gearbox, drive train and control electronics. Construction is expected to begin in August. The first 90-ton nacelle is expected to be shipped from the factory in December 2010.

#### Hiring Teachers

To help school districts fill teaching vacancies, the Legislature approved a measure that lets them hire a teacher who retired from the district and Kansas Public Employees Retirement System and pay them more than the allowed \$20,000. HB 2072 also requires the district to pay a 20 percent surcharge to the system but exempts the salary above the \$20,000 from the current statutory salary limitation on working after retirement. I think this is a win for schools in need of good teachers and KPERs which faces a funding shortfall.

This is my last session report. If you would like to reach me during the off-session, please call me at home, (785) 462-3264. I will be gone quite a bit working on some initiatives for next year and just relaxing so you might be better off sending me email at [jmorrison@ink.org](mailto:jmorrison@ink.org). Thank you very much for all your prayers, support, questions and suggestions and friendship. I really enjoy representing the 121st District in Topeka.

### Mallard Fillmore

#### • Bruce Tinsley

