



## Free Press Viewpoint

### Flu pandemic, but don't panic

On Thursday the World Health Organization announced that the H1N1 virus – let's be simple and call it swine flu – outbreak had reached a level six on their pandemic scale, the highest rating.

So does that mean it's finally time to panic? Maybe.

The word pandemic is what is getting the most news coverage right now. It is worth remembering that the word pandemic has a very specific definition. Webster's defines it as meaning prevalent over an area, country or world. Prevalent yes, but the word does not define how virulent a pandemic might be when talking about a disease. You might have a prevalent disease (say the common cold) that is prevalent throughout the world, yet not particularly severe in nature.

So in itself the word pandemic does not mean we are all about to die. In fact the number of confirmed deaths versus the number of confirmed cases is quite low. According to the World Health Organization, there are about 26,500 cases worldwide and there have been about 140 deaths. That's just a little over half a percent fatality rate so far. And 26,500 out of a world population of about 6.7 billion means that only .0004 percent of the human race has been infected. Pretty small numbers. However, the swine flu has appeared in 73 countries in widely varying parts of the world, hence the designation as a pandemic.

The World Health Organization pandemic scale is also very specific. Phase six on the scale refers to a point when sustained community outbreaks have occurred in at least one other country in a different region from the initial outbreak. To get to this level, a disease merely needs to be prevalent in two countries in one region and one country in another region. That is the World Health Organization's definition of the peak of a pandemic, and swine flu certainly qualifies.

However, again, the organization doesn't mention severity of the illness itself in the definition, only how far it travels. What does not tend to make the headlines is that the organization has rated the severity of the swine flu as "moderate." Most people who get it don't need to go to the hospital. Large outbreaks have only occurred in a few communities, and in most cases their healthcare facilities have been up to the job.

Severity can change, of course. This particular strain of the swine flu virus is the result of a mutation and a combination of DNA, and further mutations could happen tomorrow, next week or next year.

So is it time to panic? No, but people should continue being health conscious and continue to monitor media coverage. But don't panic just because we're at the highest phase of a pandemic, because that doesn't tell the whole story.

— Kevin Bottrell

### Write us

The Colby Free Press encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

### COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963  
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor @ nwkansas.com

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout, Columns, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography. Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

Steve Haynes - Publisher

s.haynes @ nwkansas.com

#### NEWS

Kevin Bottrell - News Editor

kbottrell @ nwkansas.com

Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter

aheintz @ nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor

mballard @ nwkansas.com

Vera Sloan and Aubrey Spencer - Society Editors

colby.society @ nwkansas.com

#### ADVERTISING

Jasmine Stewart - Advertising Manager

jstewart @ nwkansas.com

Heather Woofter - Advertising Sales

hwoofter @ nwkansas.com

Kathryn Ballard - Graphic Design

kballard @ nwkansas.com

#### BUSINESS OFFICE

Tammy Withers - Office Manager

twithers @ nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator

support @ nwkansas.com

#### NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager

Lana Westfahl, Jim Jackson, Betty Morris, Jim Bowker, Judy McKnight, James Ornelas, Barbara Ornelas, Tasha Shores, Daniel Spillman

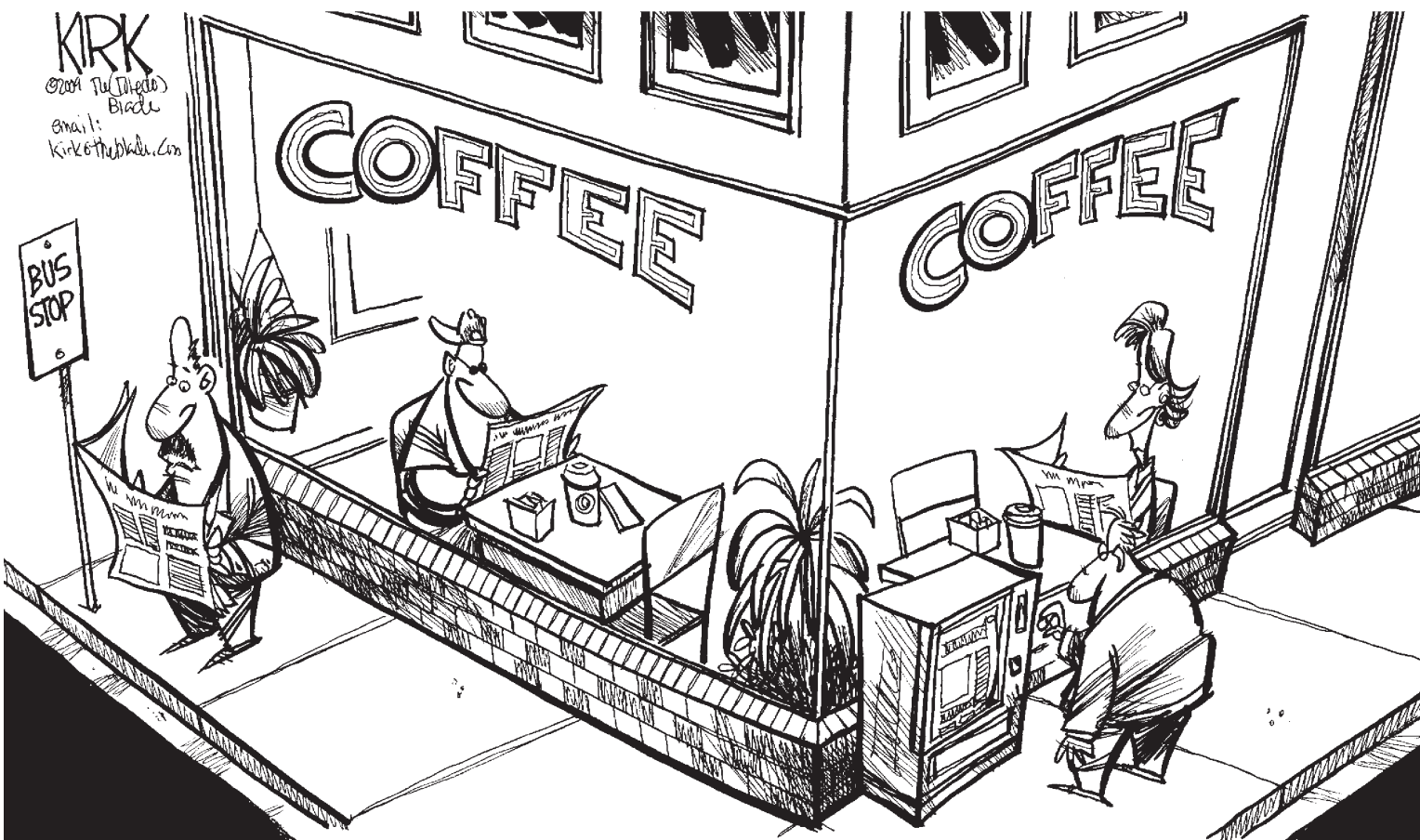
THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95. Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72

"IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO READ A PAPER WITHOUT BEING EXPOSED TO IDEAS. AND IDEAS... MORE THAN MONEY... ARE THE REAL CURRENCY FOR SUCCESS."  
--BILLIONAIRE ELI BROAD



### Daydreaming about fishing

As the weather gets warmer, and the amount of time I have to do things other than work expands, I find myself constantly gazing out the window and daydreaming about fishing the lakes, rivers and streams found in the diverse landscapes of America.

For some, fishing is simply going to the local lake or pond with a six-pack in one hand and a can of worms in the other. The image of the fisherman drinking an icy cold beer while staring at his bobber for hours waiting for a fish to bite is common among people unfamiliar with the poetic nature of the sport.

For many of us, fishing is much more than a way to pass the time; it's a way of thinking and a way of life. Anyone who has crashed through brush to get to a fishy-looking pool off the beaten path, slid down ditches so they could fish water that had not been sullied by years of human activity, admired the beauty of moving water on a free-flowing river or watched a largemouth bass explode out the water after a topwater lure has been changed in a subtle, yet profound, way that will forever link a part of themselves to the fascinating sport known as fishing.

For better or worse, fishing got under my skin a long time ago. To me, fishing has always been about adventure and serenity. No matter how many places I go, there will always be more streams to explore, more rivers to wade,



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

more ponds to test and more lakes to master.

There will be barbed-wire fences to duck under, boulders to scale, rapids to wade, branches to get tangled up in and snakes to tiptoe around. And every place will have something special about it that remains lodged in the brain, even if I can't put into words what that is.

The feeling of peace and tranquility that comes over a person while wading in a stream far away from howls of civilization is something that leads people from different classes, races and religions away from their families and jobs to try and recapture the magic of that moment if just for a couple hours. The allure of fishing is a universal language known to all people.

Like many other anglers, there have been countless times when I have sought refuge at a familiar stream or river just to get my head straight. There is something reassuring about finding that fishing hole where you know every rock, every riffle and every tree limb. It

acts as a wall of stability in a world that is constantly changing whether I like it or not.

And one of the best and worst things about fishing is you will never run out of fish to catch. In a sense, fishing is a the goal-oriented person's paradise because there will always be a bigger fish.

Yes, we fishermen suffer from the same moral failings that afflict most human beings. Once we catch that fish we've been dreaming about for years, we are only able to stay content for a few days before we start dreaming about catching a fish that's even bigger than the one we just caught.

So when you see the lawyer, policeman, construction worker, teacher, reporter, judge, farmer or politician staring out into the distance with a look of longing written all over his or her face, they are probably experiencing that quiet desperation that will eventually lead them to ditch work or put off mowing the lawn or fixing the crack in the wall — just to get back on their favorite lake, stream or pond where they can cast shiny objects at creatures who have no idea how much joy they bring to people all over the world.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

### With health care, one size does not fit all

America is a far-ranging land that many different folks are proud to call home.

Americans have different values, ethnicities, religions, education levels and jobs. A distinct difference that we share is our health care needs.

No cut, bruise, scrape, or illness is exactly alike. Even the facilities where folks go for care differ in size and resources. In fact, the congressional district I am privileged to represent, Kansas' 1st Congressional District, alone has 75 hospitals — the most of any congressional district in the country.

I have visited each of these facilities and have learned that each one faces different challenges. When it comes to America's health care needs, one size definitely does not fit all.

As the health care reform debate begins in Congress, some lawmakers are pushing one-size-fits-all government-mandated universal health care. I am concerned that a Washington takeover of health care would fail to reduce escalating costs and jeopardize quality. The numbers to move 131 million people to the government rolls do not add up.

The Medicare trustees recently reported that the "unfunded liability" of Medicare, or amount of benefits promised that are not cov-



U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran

• Capitol Notes

ered by taxes, is nearly \$38 trillion over the next 75 years. With this staggering shortfall, I do not see how the federal government could deliver the type of care some are promising without cutting care to seniors, rationing critical services or increasing tax rates.

We should make health care services accessible to every American. We need to provide incentives to empower low-income families to retain or purchase private health insurance. We need to support community health centers and other facilities that provide health care to the poor.

We also must increase the supply of qualified medical professionals through recruitment and retention incentives. We must reform our medical liability system and reduce frivolous lawsuits that lead to inflated insurance premiums and the practice of "defensive medicine."

where doctors order every possible test for fear of being sued.

We need to upgrade our outdated health records system through the use of new technology which will streamline costs and reduce medical errors. We need to allow individuals to utilize health savings accounts and other incentive plans, which engage folks in their health care decisions and incentivize them to be proactive in their health.

Finally, we need to start placing as much emphasis on wellness as we do on illness. Both wellness and treatment are essential to maintaining health and reducing costs.

We stand at an important juncture in our health care system. Most agree that our current health care system is broken and unsustainable. Also, almost everyone agrees that, in order to fix our broken system, we must reduce underlying health care costs.

It is my hope that we will have a true exchange of ideas and a real debate on the different proposals that will bring some much needed change to our current system. The heartbeat of our nation is fueled by many different hopes and dreams, and the health of our nation is not subject to a one-size-fits-all diagnosis.

### Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 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, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Room 143-N, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7676 e-mail: jmorriso@ink.org

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW10th St., Room 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

