



## Free Press Viewpoint

### Still not swine flu, whatever you say

In a Thursday press release, Kansas Rep. Jerry Moran implored newspapers and broadcasters to give up the use of the misnomer "swine flu" when referring to the H1N1 flu virus now plaguing the world.

Unfortunately the congressman is a little late to the party in several ways. The first is that, with a few exemptions, the media has already stopped calling it the swine flu. The big three of cable news, CNN, Fox News and MSNBC, no longer call it that. A quick survey of Kansas papers reveals that almost none of them — aside from the Lawrence Journal-World — refer to H1N1 as the swine flu any more.

For a while, it was this paper's policy to refer to it as the swine flu because of the overriding popularity of the term. We try to use common spoken language whenever possible. However the increasing swing toward calling it H1N1 took hold here, too.

So if we're already on board with the name change, why is Moran still advocating acting. It's because while the media has caught on, the people haven't.

This strain became known as the swine flu because when information was first released, that's what everyone — doctors, "experts" and government officials — called it. Back in mid-summer, the information coming from the World Health Organization, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and even our own Kansas Department of Health and the Environment all named it the swine flu. This is because of the virus' apparent similarity to flu viruses found among pigs. It was later found that the H1N1 virus contained some similar DNA, but also DNA from several other flu strains.

In situations like this, we do reach for simple catch phrases or labels that they can use over and over again. If you're skimming the Fox News web site or flipping past their channel and you see a headline that says, "swine flu," you immediately know what it's about. The media is good at this process. Think how quickly after events such as Watergate, 9/11 or "balloon boy" the labels caught on. And swine flu caught on because it came first. People are slower to change a label like that to something more scientific.

Officials changed their tune after pig farmers complained. And Moran's concern is for the pig farmers out there. There are a lot of stories claiming that the label is bad for the pork industry, and many producers are right here in Kansas.

However, what most of these stories report is a drop in the price of pork futures and an industry that is already being hurt by high feed prices. The actual impact of the mis-named virus is very hard to gauge. Corporations, governments and political groups are often quick to assume that the public easily gets the wrong impression.

In any case, the farmers and packers have been at the forefront of renaming the virus since the beginning, even though the health agencies have been also been saying all along that you can't get the virus from eating pork.

The term swine flu isn't going away now. It's ingrained into the public awareness. But the major news outlets have already given it up, and maybe in the end that will sway the public.

Moran is a bit behind the times, but even if he is late to the party, let's just be glad he showed up at all. — *Kevin Bottrell*

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the *Colby Free Press*, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

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### Obama just isn't a 'good old boy'

It amazes me to see how many people loathe and fear President Barack Obama. I'm not surprised they oppose his policies, but the hatred many have for this man is a little worrisome.

Dissent is a key ingredient in a democratic society, and conservatives shouldn't be criticized for disagreement. Liberals and conservatives could both be more tolerant of opposing viewpoints. But there is a big difference between dissent and paranoid extremism.

Since he began his run for president, Obama has been called a socialist, a Marxist, a racist, a communist, an elitist, a terrorist sympathizer and the anti-Christ. He has been accused of promoting Nazi-like policies, protesters at town hall meetings have been seen holding signs of the president with an Adolph Hitler mustache and some conservatives say he lacks American values.

His administration's health care reform plan has been portrayed as a secret plot to kill old people, and no matter how many times his birth certificate is presented to the public, some people still don't think he was born in this country.

Many conservatives in the media, who make a living criticizing liberals for being too quick to label people as racist and ignorant, have been silent about the vile hatred being hurled at the president.

These folks have proven themselves to be cowards afraid to confront the people who make them feel rich and important. They self-righteously denounce the mainstream media and college professors for looking down on working people, yet they don't have the guts to go after members of their own party.

In fact many in the conservative media are not only refusing to condemn those maliciously attacking the character of our president, they are actually adding fuel to the fire by adding their own outrageous statements into the mix.

On the Fox News morning show, *Fox and Friends*, Glenn Beck said Obama has a deep-seated hatred of white people. He went on to say that he thought Obama was a racist. He said this despite the fact that Obama is half-



**Andy Heintz**

• Wildcat Ramblings

white and was raised by a white mother. So I guess Beck believes Obama has deep-seated hatred for his own mother.

Republican strategist and Fox News contributor Karl Rove has gone out of his way to portray the president as a snob.

"He is the guy at the country club with the beautiful date, holding the martini and cigarette that stands against the wall and makes snide comments about everyone else," said Rove.

Many, including myself, have trouble seeing how this description jibes with the life the president has led. His work as a community organizer instead of a high-paying job on Wall Street seems very anti-elitist. But today's elitism has nothing to do with being a child of privilege or supporting policies favoring the super rich. Today's elitism is all about image.

To Rove, Beck, and many Americans, Obama will always be an outsider. Liberals always ask why former president George W. Bush's sweetheart deals with shady corporations like Halliburton and Blackwater and his decision to cut taxes for the wealthy while our country was fighting two wars and running a deficit were not considered elitist policies.

They point to the former president's decision to provide subsidies to oil companies while they were making record profits as an example of Bush's elitism. What they fail to understand is today's backlash against elitism has nothing to do with economics. They can point to examples until they are blue in the face and it will have no impact.

We live in a time where elitism has nothing to do with economics. Politicians can support policies favoring the super rich and still get

support from people who won't benefit. When conservatives support deep cuts in education and anti-labor policies, oppose minimum-wage increases and support banking deregulation bound to lead to future crises, it will not stop people from viewing them as populists battling the all-powerful liberal elite. In fact, any deviation from free market orthodoxy is seen as elitist too many folks, even if these policies are already eating away at Americans declining middle class.

The reason people consider Obama an elitist is not because he's in bed with big business; it's because no matter how hard he tries, he will never be able to fit into the culture of many in rural and working class America.

He will never look as natural in a cowboy hat as Bush did. He will never be as folksy as Sarah Palin, and he will always look more comfortable in a shirt and tie than in a flannel shirt. These are the traits that make people in rural America distrust him.

Sure, they may disagree with some of his economic policies, but this alone isn't responsible for the hateful and paranoid views many people have towards the president. You don't accuse someone of being a communist or a Nazi just because you don't agree with their policies.

Obama has an image problem that he may not be able to get rid of. Some people's mistrust of Obama may be based on racist stereotypes, but most of it is based on culture. His smooth talking, charisma, good looks and big agenda is not trusted in rural America.

He will need to really work at understanding the culture in areas like Colby if he wants to gain the people's trust. But people here should keep an open mind and be a little more skeptical of the toxic rhetoric directed at the president by Rove, Beck and other conservatives who are either dishonest or ideologically incapable of understanding alternative viewpoints.

*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.*

### Gullible people still around

It appears to me that some people are just gullible. They believe everything they hear.

I have a friend like that, and I feel safe in telling this story about her because she and her family moved away from Colby many years ago. Besides, her husband has told this story in front of her many times and she just laughs right along with everyone else.

In fact, she also enjoys telling about the crazy things she sometimes does by accident. She is such a comedian that my husband Jim has nicknamed her "Phyllis Diller." I guess that is why I have always enjoyed her so much, and I always go home from her house feeling happy and in a good mood.

The particular incident happened the day after she and her husband attended a dinner meeting held by his company. While at the meeting, she was visiting with a couple of the men her husband worked with.

The next day, one of those men remarked to her husband that his wife was one of the most gullible people they had ever met. Her husband, I'll call him Tim, replied he didn't think she was quite that gullible. That was when one of the men said, "I'll prove it to you."

Now this was in the days when everyone



**Marj Brown**

• Marj's Snippets

had dial phones connected to the wall with cords. The man called my friend and when she answered he said, "I am from the phone company and we are getting ready to blow the dirt out of all of our telephone lines, so would you please cover the receivers of all your phones with paper bags so you don't get dirt in your house?" Then he held the phone receiver up to Tim's ear so he could hear.

Of course, by this time my friend was busy putting the receivers inside paper bags, so all Tim could hear was the, "rattle, rattle, rattle," of the paper bags.

When Tim came home for lunch later, the first thing he noticed was that the phone receiver in the kitchen was still covered with the paper bag. He was so angry that all he could say was, "You really are a dumb blonde."

Actually, I sort of worry about her now that we are growing older. There are so many con-

artists around nowadays, calling older people and trying to get their private information over the telephone, that I worry that she might be taken in by one of them. However, by now I am sure her family is keeping a close watch over her.

When I think about phones, I think about all of the advancements that have been made in the field of communication. When Dick Tracy comics first came out with the two-way wrist radio, I remember my mother saying that someday she thought we might really have such a thing. Wouldn't she be surprised if she were alive today and heard all of the people who are walking up and down the aisles of the grocery stores talking through a strange gadget attached to their ears?

My first memory of phones recalls when we had to give the number to the operator, share our phone line with someone else, and they could listen in on our conversations. We really have come a long way.

*Marj Brown has lived in Colby for 62 years and has spent a good deal of that time writing about people and places here. She says it's one of her favorite things to do.*

### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

