

## Other Viewpoints

### Drop in referrals troubling for kids

Good for state Sen. Dick Kelsey, R-Goddard, for raising concerns about the dramatic drop in the number of children being referred to psychiatric residential treatment facilities. Someone in Topeka needs to care.

Kelsey noted during a legislative budget hearing that the number of severely disturbed youths in such facilities has averaged between 500 and 600 for the past 13 or 14 years. But after the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services sent out a letter in January ordering a major reduction in referrals, the number of patients dropped nearly in half. "It doesn't sound logical that we fixed that many kids that quick," Kelsey said at the hearing.

Kelsey is also concerned that three psychiatric residential treatment facilities have already announced they are closing, including Youthville's 56-bed facility in Newton. Others are also expected to close. And once they are gone, Kelsey warned, they won't come back.

"We are headed for a tremendous crash in the ability of Kansas to help poor, seriously mentally and emotionally challenged youth," said Kelsey, who once owned and operated a group home for children in state custody, many of whom were mentally ill.

Social and Rehabilitation Services Secretary Rob Siedlecki said at the hearing that he regretted sending the letter in January. He said it was not his agency's intention that children would be screened out or discharged from psychiatric residential treatment facilities.

However, Social Services finalized a contract in September with Kansas Health Solutions, a managed-care company. It will pay the company up to \$6.1 million if it keeps the referral rate at the current lower level, and it will penalize the company if referrals increase.

"I'm really ticked off about this," Kelsey about the contract.

Social Services has justified the reduction in referrals by arguing that too many children were being sent to the facilities for too long. Marilyn Cook, executive director of Comcare of Sedgwick County, said at the hearing that most children can be effectively and safely served in home.

But Shelley Duncan, executive director of Youthville, told the Kansas Health Institute News Service that her facility has never had anyone who didn't need to be there. "By that I mean they were there because they had some pretty serious problems, and there really wasn't anyplace else for them," she said.

Jason Miller, a foster parent from Newton, complained in an e-mail to *The Eagle*: "SRS is cutting off funding to give kids professional help, and is instead pushing them onto parents to deal with. When parents such as myself need help to deal with the extreme behaviors that come with traumatized kids, there is nothing available."

It may be that the state had been overutilizing psychiatric residential treatment facilities. But Kelsey is correct to question whether this policy shift went too far and whether the state was more concerned about helping its bottom line than helping troubled kids.

— *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the *Colby Free Press*, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701, or e-mail [colby.editor@nwkans.com](mailto:colby.editor@nwkans.com). Opinions do not necessarily reflect those of the *Free Press*, its staff or the owners.

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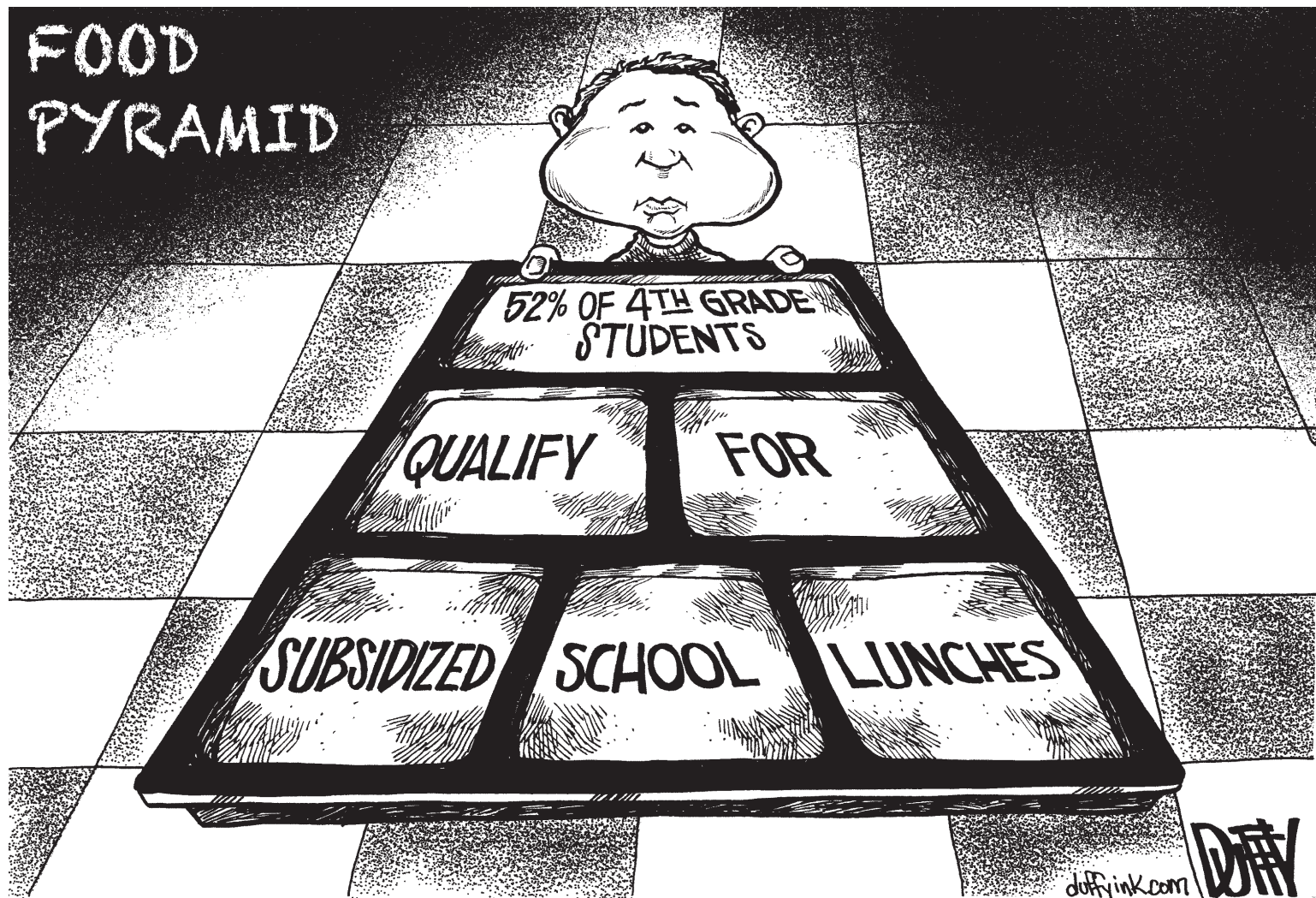
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### College seeks safety for all on campus

Dear Community:

If you are like me, the recent allegations of sexual abuse at Penn State and the Citadel, among others, have been hard – no, sickening – to hear.

How an adult could harm a defenseless child is impossible for me to understand. Given that researchers have continually found that the number of intentionally falsified claims of adolescent and child sexual abuse is minimal, the accusations will not likely remain simply alleged for much longer. If there is any discernible "silver lining" – which there certainly isn't for the victims or their families – it is that these cases have turned the attention of the public on all of higher education.

Likewise, every college and university has probably examined in the last few weeks how they address safety and security measures.

At our institution, we believe "all constituents of Colby Community College including guests and visitors have the right to be free from all violence, including sexual violence." That includes not just assault but stalking, bullying and cyber-bullying. (Yes, what you say online, if it is threatening or harmful to another, is unacceptable behavior.)

I thought it might be helpful to share how the college has approached this important issue, through education, prevention and investigation. It also may provide some pride in your school knowing that safety and security issues were addressed long before these individual cases became national news. What we do is not a reaction on our part.

First, as a college, we educate students on safety and security. This begins with sharing with current and future students, as well as the public at large, all crime statistics from on and near campus, so everyone can know what potential areas of concern, if any, exist.

The Clery Act of 1990 mandates that any higher education institution which participates in the federal financial aid program must annually compile and disseminate this data for the previous three years. Here this information can be accessed via the college website under crime log/statistics.

Further, the college provides information to students including tips for safe driving, violence prevention and Internet safety along with



**Steve Vacik**

• From the president

other topics via the website and on paper.

In addition, we sponsored a self-defense class this fall for the college and community, to train individuals to ward off would-be attackers through a variety of physical measures. Those who participated have told me how valuable the experience was and how much more confident they now feel if ever faced with a serious threat. Educating students on risks and how to avoid them is the first strategy in creating a campus climate that is safe and secure for all.

Prevention of risks is another strategy employed. We want to eliminate risks before problems occur.

The college has a full-time security officer who coordinates efforts on campus to prevent criminal behavior. The officer, in consultation with the vice president of student affairs, works closely with the local police department, the sheriff's office and the Kansas Bureau of Investigation.

This interagency approach allows the college to share and receive information which often prevents crimes, both on and off campus.

Another measure the college has taken this fall was the activation of the Violence Prevention Committee. This group was charged with developing and implementing programs that promote healthy lifestyles.

The committee recently reported on some steps needed to promote greater security. These include installing additional outside lighting, trimming shrubs and trees which could be used as hiding places and adding additional locks on some residence hall doors. Further information on this report can be found in the article "Is the college safe: Student survey says yes" in the Monday, Nov. 28 edition of the *Colby Free Press*.

Finally, as an institution we take very seri-

ously potential violations of our safety and security standards and investigate them thoroughly, administering proper punitive measures when appropriate.

Due to federal regulations including Title IX, in addition to our own rules and guidelines, we have created investigative teams and hearing boards to research complaints and adjudicate any problems or disputes in a timely manner.

Headed by Dr. Keegan Nichols, our student affairs division oversees this area at the college and goes to great lengths to protect alleged accused and accusers.

Rarely do incidents on campus rise beyond the level of alcohol abuse or petty theft, which are often addressed through community service, education and counseling. However, when they do, the college works closely with law enforcement to protect the safety, security and property of others.

Unlike what has occurred recently at other institutions, we are vigilant – maybe even hyper-sensitive.

That does not mean the college never has violations of our standards or even the law. No school can make that claim.

We can truthfully claim, though, that every official complaint or security violation is investigated. There is no willful ignorance or disinterest on our part.

Unfortunately, we live in a world where bad things happen. Nevertheless, the faculty, staff and administration at Colby Community College are committed to creating as safe and secure an environment as possible for anyone who comes onto the campus.

My position is that everyone is someone's child, sibling, spouse or friend, and I know how I would expect to see those about whom I care most treated, whether accuser or accused.

So rest easy knowing your community college is preparing for, not reacting to, incidents that may occur – through education, prevention and investigation.

*Dr. Stephen Vacik is president of Colby Community College. Vacik is a native of Fargo, N.D., and was vice president of instruction at East Mississippi Community College before moving to Colby.*

### What are they thinking?

To the Editor:

Social Security or Stealing Savings?  
A local (only) stamp should be cheaper! What is the cost of hauling mail off (to Wichita), for jobs there and hauling it back? Then closing small post offices, devastating rural people!

It would be more efficient to build a refinery there, for Alaska, Canada and North Dakota oil, than pipe the profit to Texas.

In all of Social Security – whose money was ever saved for, and returned too – plus inter-



#### Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

est? If anybody but Congress had foisted this pyramid, Ponzi, chain letter scheme on the

people of U.S.A., they would be punished for fraud. Abolish retirement (\$) for every elected official; if budget is not balanced, dock their pay, by the same percent!

"Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the way, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your soul. – Jeremiah 6:16.

Frank Sowers Benkelman, Neb.  
PS: Where doth the Constitution permit taxing everybody to benefit anyone?

#### Where to write, call

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#### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

