



12 pages

COLBY FREE PRESS



75¢

Friday

December 11, 2009
Volume 120, Number 193
Serving Thomas County since 1888

Legislators voice concerns over health bill

By Kevin Bottrell
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A compromise on health care reform by liberal and moderate Democrats in the U.S. Senate is failing to win over Republicans, especially those from Kansas.

Sen. Sam Brownback held a press conference Thursday to discuss his numerous objections to the current version of health care reform.

Brownback said much of the debate has been going on in closed door sessions.

"A number of us have not been briefed at all except for what we read in the press," he said. "We shouldn't be doing this behind closed doors. There is a reason we have an open committee process."

The current compromise bill being discussed by the senate includes allowing uninsured citizens to purchase insurance through Medicare at 55 or older instead of 65 and the creation of private insurance plans to be overseen by the same federal agency that handles the health plan currently used by legislators and their families.

The bill was touted by Senate Democrats as a compromise to avoid proposing a full-out and divisive public option.

Brownback particularly objects to increased eligibility for Medicare, noting that the American Medical Association and the American Hospital Association oppose the plan because it will hurt hospital reimbursement rates, which are already lower for Medi-

care patients.

"This is bad for Medicare and bad for the economy," he said. "Medicare is slated to go bankrupt by 2017 under current projections. This won't make it any more fiscally solvent."

Rural hospitals in Kansas, he said, would be particularly hurt by the change since they are heavily dependent on Medicare.

Rep. Jerry Moran also weighed in on the compromise bill Thursday, saying in a press release that expanding Medicare would raise premium costs and put pressure on the government to raise taxes to cover it.

"Once near-seniors enter this system, they are not likely to be pushed out and the pressure will increase to cover more people on the government rolls," he said. "This idea could be a giant step toward single-payer socialized health care in our country."

Brownback suggested congress scrap the entire proposal and begin a bi-partisan, incremental process to reduce health care costs and expand access. To start with he would propose making insurance plans portable across state lines. Brownback said he would also propose establishing state-run clinics in lower-income areas that currently have limited access to health care.

"We should take small steps and we should take them together," he said.

Brownback also objected to the timetable suggested by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, who called for a vote before the end of the year.



ANDY HEINTZ/Colby Free Press

??? and their fellow students at Colby High School went to class in their pajamas Wednesday as part of a fund-raising effort by the Young Humanitarians, a student organization who is raising money to buy beds for students in the town of Malumfashi, Nigeria. The group raised \$810 from 170 staff and student donors.

Students don pajamas for fund raiser

By Andy Heintz
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Colby High students rolled out of their beds and headed to school in their pajamas on Wednesday as part of an awareness campaign entitled "Beds for Africa" sponsored by the new student organization, the Young Humanitarians.

The new student group had encouraged people to come to school in their pajamas and donate \$2 or more to help pay for extra beds for students in Malumfashi, a town in northern Nigeria. Students were first informed about the fund raiser during a school-wide assembly on Monday.

Rick Williams, faculty advisor for the Young Humanitarians, said 170 students and staff members donated \$810. Williams donated \$85 by himself.

"I told the students and staff I would donate \$0.50 cents for every person at the high school who participated," he said.

Williams said his girlfriend, Alex Clements, a special education teacher from Ulysses, had worked in Malumfashi for 2 1/2 months this summer and she thought the students were attending a productive school in the town, despite not having all the materials available in wealthier schools. He said while the students were attending a good school, the kids lived in a broken-down apartment complex down the street from the school where they slept on little foam mattresses.

"The mattresses are basically just pieces of foam," Williams said.

The money raised by the school will be sent to Clements who will send it to Sister Rita Schwarzenberger, who ministers and works in Nigeria as a member of the Dominican Sisters of Peace. The non-profit group

is made up of seven United States congregations of apostolic Dominican sisters who teach catechism and invest in programs to help less fortunate people around the world.

The programs in Nigeria include giving micro-credit loans to poor rural women, building better schools, providing clean drinking water by assisting in provision of wells for potable drinking supply, training village health workers and traditional birth attendants, corrective surgery for rickets (abnormal bone formation in children due to inadequate calcium in their bones), literacy classes, health education and training in sewing. They also train indigenous church leaders in Nigeria. The organization has been working in the country since 1956.

Schwarzenberger will make sure the money is spent to provide the students living in

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Breakfast for lunch



EVAN BARNUM/Colby Free Press

Tracey Galli (from left), Pete Ziegelmeier II and Chuck Sadler flip eggs and pancakes for the Gem Lions Club's annual pancake feed Wednesday. Ziegelmeier said the event saw a bit lower attendance at lunch-time than in previous years, but they had a good crowd at dinner-time despite the snowy roads.

Organization aims to help towns grow

By Vera Sloan
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Western Prairie RC&D could well be the best-kept secret in Northwest Kansas. Although they are in their 15th year, many don't know they exist, and if they do, they don't know what they do.

RC&D stands for Resource Conservation and Development, and is a non-profit corporation that is administered by the United States Department of Agriculture and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. And that's a mouthful, so Western Prairie RC&D is its more common name. It serves eight northwest Kansas counties.

They came about through the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962, and received permanent authori-

zation as a part of the 2002 farm bill, which is the reason the conservation service administers the program.

Their purpose is to encourage and improve the ability of volunteer, locally elected and civic leaders to plan and carry out projects for conservation and economic development in the communities.

There are 12 RC&D areas across the state that are set up to serve rural needs.

The service has one paid federal employee, with a council of two volunteers from each county — people from all walks of life who are willing to volunteer their time to help make positive things happen in their community.

"It is common for rural communities to have difficulty in locating and acquiring funds and other

resources to improve their communities and to help keep young people from leaving," said Duane Cheney, coordinator for Western Prairie. "RC&D provides those resources."

"RC&D knows where to go and who to go to, if the project has indications of being strong," he added.

Non-profits without a 501 (c) (3) designation find it hard to access grants from local and major foundations.

Western Prairie RC&D Area, Inc. holds that IRS designation and is able to be a fiscal agent or flow through for organizations to complete needed projects.

They are currently working with the Brewster Community Grocery store in accessing funds for operation equipment. The grocery store

does not have the 501 (c) (3) designation, but were able to obtain an award through a local foundation by using the RC&D as their fiscal agent.

They also provide assistance to Home Town Competitiveness Activities, a program that help youth to put down roots in their hometowns.

In April, they brought 300 fourth graders from 11 schools in eight northwest counties to Colby for an opportunity to learn about water, wildlife and natural resources.

Western Prairie helped bring about the Northwest Kansas Regional Recycling Organization, located in Colby. It serves as a hub for eight counties in an effort to reduce the cost of solid waste

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Briefly

Legion offers Christmas dinner

The Colby American Legion will hold a Christmas dinner at 6 p.m. Sunday at the American Legion Club, 1850 W. Fourth St. The public is invited for soup, sandwiches, drinks, and gifts for children 9 and under. If the dinner is snowed out, it will be held on Sunday, Dec. 20. For information, call Jim at 269-7074.

Piano students perform Sunday

Piano students of Pat Ziegelmeier will hold a recital at 1:30 p.m. Sunday at Colby United Methodist Church. The recital, which is open to the public, will include a variety of Christmas solos and duets. For information, call Ziegelmeier at 460-5518.

Benefit for Colby family

There will be a benefit soup supper and silent auc-

tion for the family of Bob Rundel, who died Saturday, at 5 p.m. Tuesday at the Community Building. For information, call Kathy Vaughn at 462-7306.

Moran advisor to hold meeting

Brian Perkins, health care policy advisor to Rep. Jerry Moran, will hold a town hall meeting on health care reform legislation from noon to 1 p.m. Wednesday at Pioneer Memorial Library. Perkins will give an update on current legislation and listen to concerns from the public. For information, call Moran's office at (620) 665-6138.

Bible, lunch merge for Advent

The Thomas County Ministerial Association is sponsoring "Advent Brown Bags and Bible" from noon to 12:50 p.m. Wednesdays in the Fellowship Hall of the Colby Presbyterian Church, 515 W. Fourth

St. The theme this year is "Joy to the World." Jarrod Spencer (Church of Christ) will speak Wednesday, with Larry Booth on Dec. 23. Everyone is welcome for fellowship, scripture, hymns and a brief Advent message. Bring a sack lunch; dessert and beverage will be provided. For information, call 462-6342.

Native American lecture Thursday

Dr. Linda Davis-Stephens will speak at the Prairie Museum of Art and History's "Food for Thought" lecture series at noon Thursday at the museum. Davis-Stephens, an instructor at Colby Community College, will speak about the history of the plains Indians. For information, call the museum at 460-4590.

Fourth grade program delayed

The Colby Grade School fourth grade music pro-

gram has been postponed to next Thursday. There will be two showings at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. in the grade school auditorium. The performances are free and open to the public. For information, call the school at 460-5100.

Fatherhood program to start soon

The Northwest Kansas Regional Prevention Center's "24/7 Dad" fatherhood program will be offered again starting at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 5 at the First Presbyterian Church in Colby. For information, call the center at 460-8177.



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