



Other Viewpoints

More info needed on listeria in Kansas

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment repeatedly has refused to reveal even the vaguest geographic locations of the state's confirmed cases of listeria caused by Colorado cantaloupes.

It is a cowardly decision that keeps Kansas residents in the dark about whether they should be concerned about Rocky Ford cantaloupes that were sold and eaten during the summer months.

What we know is this: Jensen Farms in the Rocky Ford, Colo., area is the source of a listeria outbreak involving tainted cantaloupes. The cantaloupe was shipped to retailers between July 29 and Sept. 10. Local Dillon's stores carried Rocky Ford Cantaloupes until Aug. 29, when they transitioned to fruit grown in California. Eight Kansans have fallen ill to listeria, and two have died. With an incubation period of 70 days, more Kansans could come down sick, and it could be linked to the listeria-ridden cantaloupe.

Yet, thanks to the Department of Health's absurd code of silence, residents in southwest Kansas and northeast Kansas are in the same boat, and neither knows whether those flu-like symptoms are simply the flu or something more troublesome. Meanwhile, it could be that a single shipment to one region of Kansas is of concern, while the rest of the state is in the clear.

There is absolutely no reason Kansas Department of Health officials can't simply say the deaths and illnesses occurred in one part of the state — even an area as vast as a quadrant. It has been done before — both when there was a hantavirus scare and when the West Nile virus was afflicting Kansans. In both cases, the department at least offered a vague geographic location, which helped put the other regions at ease.

That is the least department officials could do now, if they were truly interested in giving Kansans the information they need to protect themselves from this most recent public health concern. Instead, they are hiding behind a handful of illnesses while potentially endangering the rest of the state's residents.

— *The Hutchinson News, via the Associated Press*

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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.

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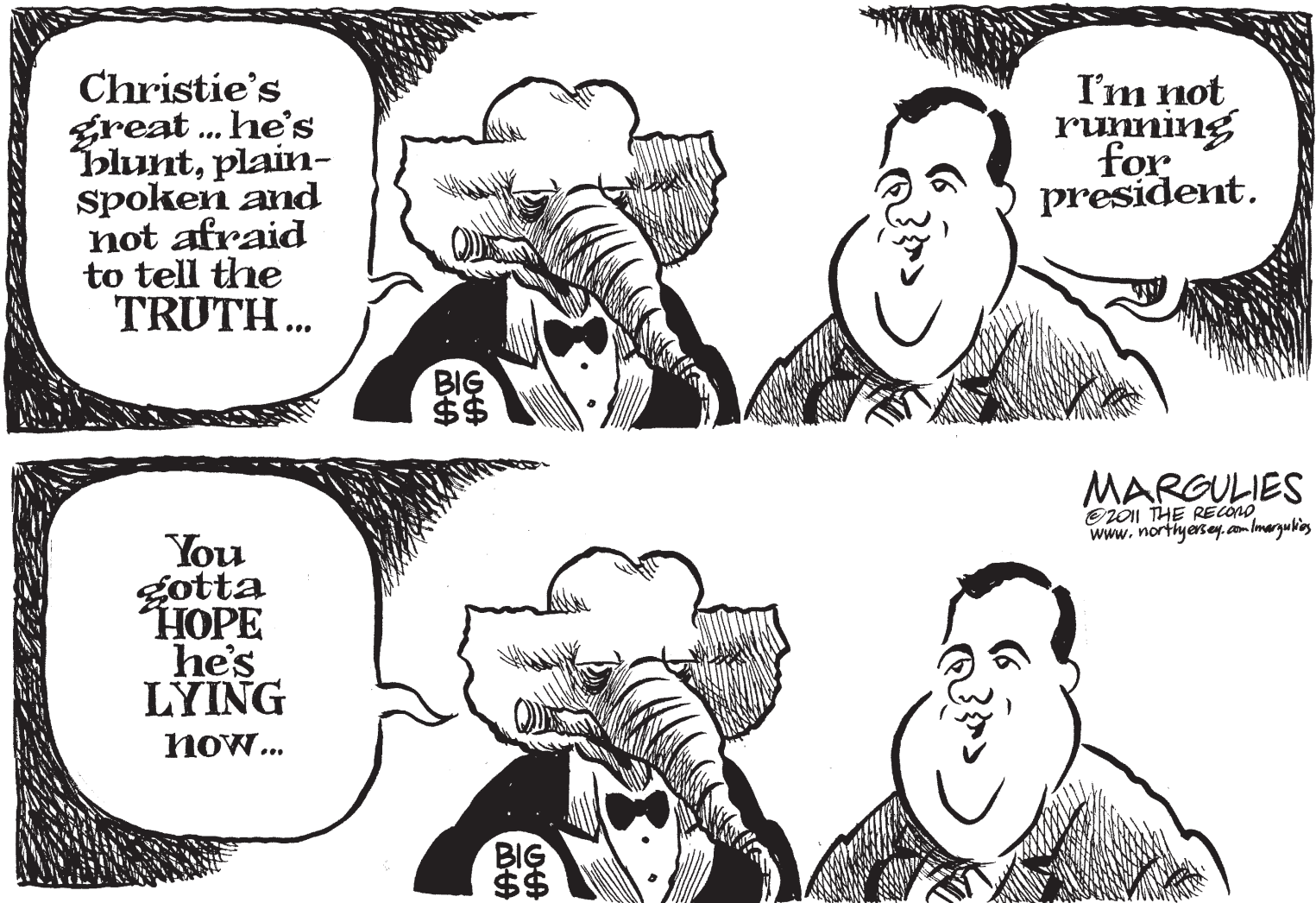
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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W.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



Reality once again a moving target

The keynote speaker at a conference we were at last week pointed out how fleeting our perceptions of what is can be.

Dr. Lowell Catlett is an economist and dean of the School of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Science at New Mexico State University, Las Cruces — and one heck of a speaker. He combines the cadence of a black Baptist preacher, the folksiness of a Panhandle ranch kid (which he is) and the insight of a keen observer of what is and will be.

When he was in school, he recalled, a scientist declared that the world's known reserves of oil would be used up by 1980.

"And I didn't even have my driver's license yet," he complained.

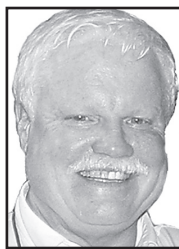
But every year since 1960, those reserves have risen as drillers find more oil. The Bakken field in South Dakota, stretching to Canada and Montana, is said to be larger than those in Saudi Arabia. Beneath it, too deep to recover today, lies another, still larger pool.

We've been told we depend too much on foreign oil, he said. Today, the U.S. imports about 8 percent of its energy; tomorrow, we could be self-sufficient.

So much for running out of oil, at least in our lifetime.

His point, of course, was that what seems so certain today has a way of changing tomorrow.

We all remember the Population Bomb, and how it was supposed to bring on mass starvation before the millennium. The "best science" of that day did not account for changes in human behavior — having fewer children — or on



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

the magic of modern agriculture — growing more food.

And of course, we all knew the threat of nuclear annihilation would be with us forever. Just as the Soviet empire would be. And the threat of terrorism will be. And global warming.

And, of course, Dr. Catlett said, we've all heard about the rising cost of medical care and how it will break the nation. That'll never happen, he told us. Why?

Right now, somewhere between 40 and 60 percent of all medical-care expense comes in the last six months of life. Most of it is wasted, doing little to improve either the length or the quality of our final days.

America has changed dramatically in the last century, he said. A hundred years ago, most American were born at home and most would die there. Today, we're born in a hospital and most of us will die in one.

But that's not how he sees his life, he said. And he asked the audience, most of us aging Baby Boomers like him, how many of them wanted to spend their last six months in the hospital, enduring needless pain and expense. Few hands went up.

No, he said, the Boomers — and Hospice — will solve the crisis with Medicare and health costs. Government "death panels" won't be needed. Politicians will have to find something else to scare us with.

The way we act, Dr. Catlett said, can be explained by something called Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs; a theory of human behavior that dates back to the 1940s. Abraham Maslow postulated that people respond first to basic needs, such as air, water, food and shelter. For centuries, perhaps, that's all that mattered.

But today, we are well off enough that most Americans can worry about the tip of the needs pyramid, which Dr. Maslow designated as "self-actualization." We worry not about living, but the quality of life.

It's the difference, he said, between eating and organic.

One more story he told: growing up on a west Texas ranch, all he could think of was leaving. When his mother called a few years ago, he told her he did *not* want the ranch, that she should sell it. It was good for nothing but raising short grass and dust, he thought.

Last year, a fellow speaker at another conference told him he'd been signing up Panhandle ranch land for wind-tower leases, minimum of \$10,000 a year. His neighbors landed 100 towers, he said. \$1 million a year in long-term, triple-net leases.

It just goes to show, he said, you can't assume what is today always will be.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

Great teachers turn kids on to learning

What would happen if all of the teachers at a school were "super teachers"? In most school buildings, you can usually find one or two teachers who are outstanding. They are the ones who always have their students excited and wanting to come to school.

In 1975, the American international school in Hong Kong recruited 15 new teachers from across the United States. That international school essentially cherry-picked the best and brought them to an expanding K-12 complex in Repulse Bay in Hong Kong.

The overseas American families found themselves overwhelmed. Their students from kindergarten to senior high school were "turned on" and wanted to be in far more than any 24-hour day allowed. There was Model United Nations and science fairs and theater and music events. After-school field trips were piled on top of each other. Students could not attend them all, but they wanted to.

This overseas school served the children of consulate officials as well as overseas corporate families: Union Carbide, Caterpillar, Exxon and many other big name companies. It was the center of life for both students and their families. These were highly motivated parents, paid two or three times their stateside salary to live and work overseas. Attendance at parent-teacher meetings was always 100 percent. But we saw those parents anyway at after-school and evening events. Yes, this was not a bell-shaped distribution of students. All graduated. And all went on to quality colleges and universities.

At the end of that year of super teachers, the head of school confided in us an interesting



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

fact: drug use among students had essentially disappeared. Hong Kong, a major international free port, has always seen a bustling traffic in illegal drugs and particularly heroin. Unlike in the U.S., the drugs are not "cut" but are full strength and cheap. Among all of the junior and senior high schools across that pre-1997 British colony — whether they were British or Chinese or Communist schools — drug addiction was always a concern for those students with money.

But for a few years, drug use essentially disappeared. And it was "super teachers" that did it. These passionate teachers got their kids excited about meaningful things in life. The students had no need, desire or time to mess with drugs. They were already "high" on the exciting things they wanted to do the next day, the next week, the next month — in school.

The amazing part of this anti-drug effect was that the teachers did not consciously spend one second of time addressing drug abuse. It was all done by focusing on the excitement of learning. These teachers of course helped their students achieve academically, and without any need for external standards or testing.

This effect slowly went away, both as the super teachers dispersed and as the interna-

tional school served more single-parent families and special needs students, and had a more bell-shaped curve of achievement. To me, the lesson was clear. Super teachers can decrease drug use and increase academic performance by getting kids "high" on life. But the question remains: can super teachers save our schools today?

A recent *Wall Street Journal* piece is titled: "Super Teachers Alone Can't Save Our Schools."

According to author Steven Brill: "Extraordinary educators are rare and often burn out. To save our schools ... we have to demand more from ordinary teachers...." He follows several super teachers and shows their burn out in charter schools, trying to make Annual Yearly Progress under the current testing tyranny.

Indeed many excellent veteran teachers have forsaken our assembly line test-prep systems. If I was permitted to establish a school that again allowed teachers to make the professional decisions about what to teach, how to teach, and when to teach it, there are scores of passionate super teachers who would return to teach in such a school.

But the current school system is one that discourages super teachers and uses the drudgery of test-prep to drive students to drop out and perhaps find another "high."

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

