

## College plans conversion to geothermal heating

The announcement last week that a Kansas community college has snared a grant to help pay for converting its campus to geothermal heating and cooling sounds great. It'll be widely applauded, but it's a little frightening.

Geothermal systems take heat out of the ground in the winter and put it back in the summer, much like a heat pump takes heat out of the air to heat a home. A few systems are hardly likely to affect the environment, but there's a symptom here of a larger problem.

We don't really know how "alternative" energy sources will affect our home planet, because to date, we haven't had much experience with them. Wind, solar, geothermal, water (wave, current, or gravity), all these so-called "green" sources are mostly unknowns.

It's true they won't directly produce the "greenhouse" gases so feared today as a cause of global warming, but what exactly they will do to the environment as a whole — we really don't know.

In a sense, we're in the same position with this as industrial society was a century or two ago, when we were just launching our heavy use of fossil fuels.

Burning fossil fuels for energy is easy — they burn, you capture part of the heat — but mostly inefficient. The more we've burned, the more efficient we've become. But it's still pretty primitive.

While wind and solar systems are the most popular, proposals range from geothermal to dozens of ways to harness water power. Each will have its environmental price, a price which may not be apparent without years of experience.

That's because every transfer of energy involves the basic principles of physics, one of which is that for every action, there's an equal and opposite reaction.

So consider the possibility, as we move more and more to alternative power, that thousands of wind generators spring up on the plains of Mid America. Energy is removed from the atmosphere and transferred to the east and west coasts, where the bulk of the population lives.

Could that someday affect the weather somewhere? Of course.

If you move enough energy, you're transferring heat from one place to another. Thousands of wind generators might affect the weather here and there, often in ways no one will predict.

Wind speeds altered? Weather in the Midwest cooler? Over the Atlantic, warmer? Could be. No one knows for sure.

And if thousands of solar panels someday line the Southwest, could that remove enough heat to affect the climate there? Quite possible. Again, no one knows what the long-term impact may be.

Geothermal systems? Build enough of them, you're sure to affect the underground foundations of our continent. Rocks might get cooler far below, water sources could be altered or disturbed, flows changed, no one knows. The result could be everything from dry wells to even earthquakes.

All we really know is we've heard that fossil fuels are bad for us and we're searching for better alternatives. And those seem apparent, but without careful study, how do we know they're really an improvement over what we have?

The answer is, we don't. We're just poking around in the dark.

This is not to say we shouldn't look for better energy sources; just that any major change like this demands careful study. Otherwise, we will pay a price no one can measure today.

That's a scary prospect.

— Steve Haynes

## A big thanks

Dear Ted Sanko,

Thank you for organizing the new Norton County Ambulance building. The construction has been a great economy booster for the community hiring local contractors which employed numbers that kept employment in town.

Through all the weather delays, federal regulations, family deaths and backstabbing criticisms you took the bull by the horns and constructed an impressive building.

The community needs to appreciate the cooperative hands-on constructing of the



Norton County Ambulance Barn.

Thank you,

Beverly Miller

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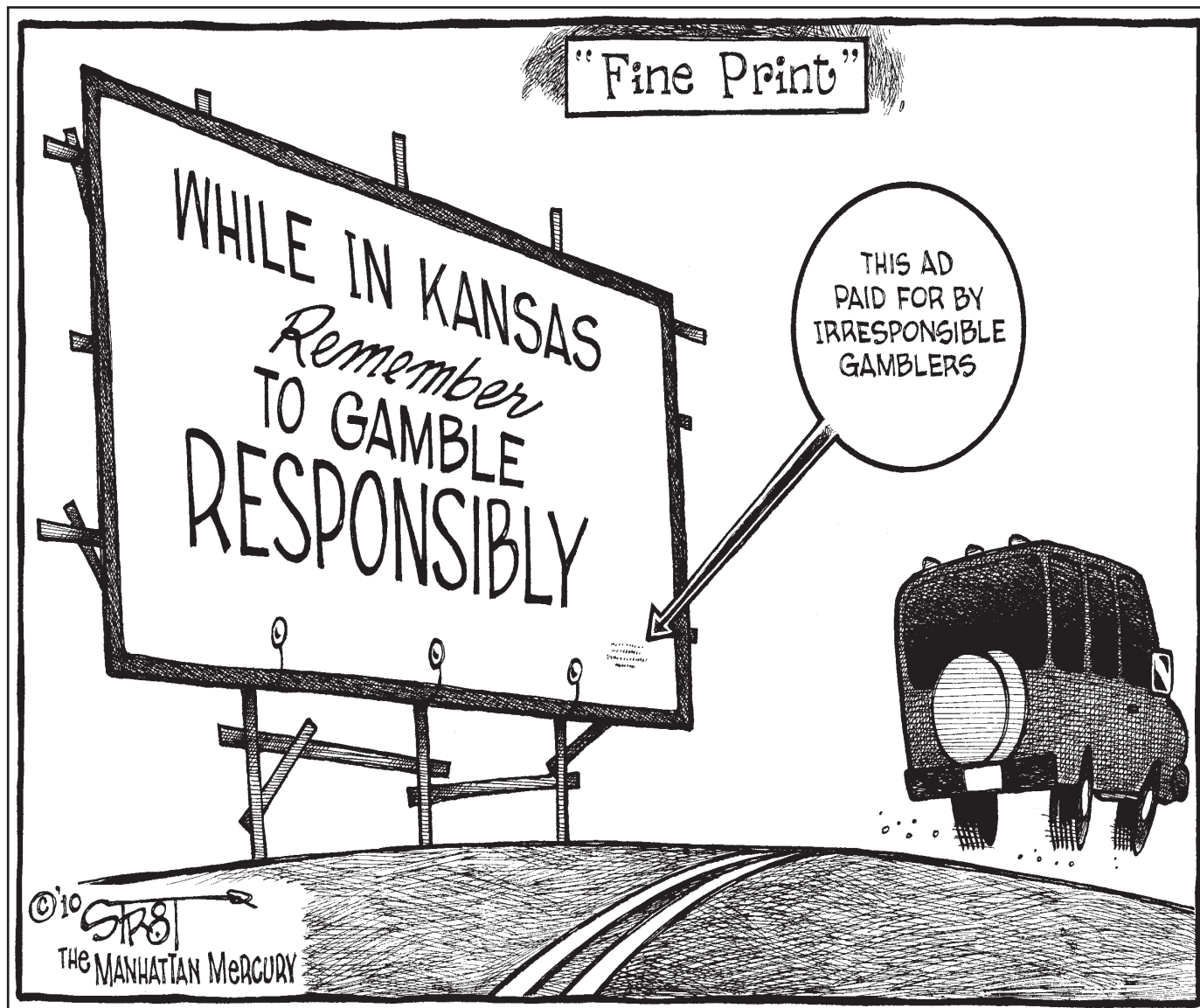
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## Daughter's surgery successful

Hearing about someone's surgery may be your least favorite topic of conversation. But, wait 'til you hear about my daughter's operation.

Halley's surgery was in a fantastic new hospital. When we checked in it was like registering for a stay at a five-star hotel. Her sister and I were given a buzzer similar to one given at restaurants when you have an extensive wait. Halley's first comment was, "Table for two, please." And, that pretty much set the tone for the rest of the stay.

As we waited in the pre-op area, Halley's friends started to arrive. Finally, a nurse had to intervene and ask two to leave before the next two would be allowed in. It turned into a real party with Hostess Halley the main attraction.

Finally, it was time for her to be wheeled into surgery. Her sister, Kara, and I were kissing her good-bye and starting to get a little emotional. I was giving her one last hug and whispered into her ear, "Love you, Honey. I'll see you on the other side." Which, of course, isn't what I meant to say.

Halley sat bolt upright, and said, "I hope you meant the other side of the door, Mom."

Kara chimed in with, "Don't go to the light, Halley. Don't go to the light." And, that's the way we sent Halley into surgery; everyone doubled over in laughter.

The waiting room was a continuation of the good times. Only, this was no sterile, uncomfortable waiting room. This was the lobby area complete with

## Out Back Carolyn Plotts



fireplace, overstuffed chairs, flowers, gourmet coffee and breakfast bar. Halley's friends were committed to wait with us. They are an eclectic group of women: sophisticated, business savvy, funny, smart, stylish and most of all, kind. We sat and shared our favorite Halley stories and being her mom, I had the best ones. We must have been a little rowdy because one of the receptionists came back and said, "Are you the ones having all the fun back here? Wish I could join your party."

The first time our buzzer went off was to update us on Halley's progress in surgery. The next was to tell us she was out of surgery. Next, we were "buzzed" for a quick consultation with the surgeon. Finally, the buzzer let us know she was in her room and we could go see her. All very high-tech.

Halley's first hours after surgery can best be described as "loopy." She kept insisting that the penguins were really little men. Out-of-it, or not, it was good to see her again. The intravenous line kept her hydrated and pain-free.

The day after surgery she felt fine and was practically back to her old self. The hospital is part of an educational program that incorporates high school students,

considering a career in health-care, into the staff. A young man, about 16, came into Halley's room announcing, "I'm here to take your vitals."

It must have been his first time without the direct supervision of a nurse because he was very nervous. He fumbled with the cords, blood pressure cuff and wires. Halley tried to make conversation with him, asking if he was considering a career in nursing. He couldn't seem to make anything work and even tapped on the unit. When he held the plug-in and looked around for an outlet, Halley said, "You can unplug my phone charger and use that one." The boy reached over and pulled the plug. When he did, Halley gasped and fell back on her pillow.

A look of pure horror washed over his face. I, of course, collapsed in laughter. Halley apologized and said, "Hey, I was just messin' with 'ya man."

To which he replied, "Do you know how much trouble I would be in?"

Anyway, we're home now, and Halley is recuperating very nicely. She's walking, eating regular meals and sleeping a lot. She's actually, letting me help her. And, I'm trying not to be too overbearing. After being home a day, I gave up waiting outside the bathroom door. She thought that was a bit much.

It's good to have the new and improved Halley back. And, for as much light as I make of everything, it was very serious and more than a little scary. But, hey, that's just our family. We cope with humor. If we weren't making jokes, we might be crying. Personally, I think laughing is better.

## Celebrate agriculture

### Insight

John Schlageck

In case you hadn't noticed, agriculture provides almost everything we eat, use and wear on a daily basis. This industry is increasingly contributing to fuel and other bioproducts.

Still, too few people understand and appreciate this contribution. This is particularly true in our schools today where students may be exposed to agriculture only if they enroll in related vocational training — if it even exists.

March 20 marks the first day of spring. It falls during National Ag Week, March 14-20. This is a time to recognize and celebrate the abundance provided by this nation's farmers and ranchers.

National Ag Week encourages each and every American to understand how food and fiber products are produced, value the essential role of agriculture in maintaining a strong economy and appreciate the role agriculture plays in providing safe, abundant and affordable products.

It's during this period we as agricultural associations help those in our communities understand how food, fiber and renewable resource products are produced. We must highlight the essential

role agriculture plays in maintaining a strong Kansas economy as well as our U.S. economy.

It's up to us to foster an appreciation of the role agriculture plays in providing safe, abundant and affordable food, fuel and fiber among today's citizenry. Also, we must inform this same population about the career opportunities in the agricultural industry.

Agriculture is too important a topic to be taught only to a small percentage of students considering careers in agriculture and pursuing vocational agricultural studies.

Across Kansas March 14-20, county Farm Bureau organizations will provide programs informing Kansans about agriculture as well as celebrating our industry's contributions.

Activities for National Ag Week include radio programs on farming and ranching, breakfasts, ag book distributions, library displays about agriculture,

newspaper ads, farm tours, ag implement dealer tours and farm and ranch safety.

All of these activities are intended to increase the knowledge of agriculture and nutrition among today's consumers to help them make informed personal choices about diet and health. Informed citizens will also be better able to participate in establishing the policies that will support a competitive agricultural industry in the country and around the world.

A few generations ago, most Americans were directly involved in — or had relatives or friends involved in agricultural-related endeavors. Today, that's no longer the case.

That's why it is so important we join together on this special week devoted to telling the story of this unparalleled success story. Remember, celebrate agriculture this March 14-20.

Agriculture is truly amazing.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.