

Opinion

Another Viewpoint



Call for clean energy

By Helen Waller
As a farmer from eastern Montana, my viewpoint on energy development in Montana is influenced by my concern for people who live and make a living on land that sits over the coal, oil, and gas. The merits of technologies that convert coal to diesel fuel are only a part of the debate. The issue of negative economic, environmental, and social impacts of strip mining must factor in to our decision-making. Thirty years ago, as now, high energy costs prompted plans to build a synthetic fuels "bridge" to the time when renewable energy sources were a viable alternative. At that time, the United States relied on foreign imports for just over one third of its oil. Today, dependence has grown to 56 percent, imported mostly from not-so-friendly countries. Our national security is at risk and begs for a plan that would chart the way to energy security. There is no simple answer, and because of our diverse energy needs, we should expect these requirements to be met from multiple sources.

At the federal level, Congress passed the Energy Policy Act of 2005, which provides increased incentives to the oil industry, coal-to-fuel projects, as well as renewable energy sources.

While improved technology for coal-to-fuel is on the drawing board and demonstration projects will follow, it is not a "quick-fix" solution. Today's coal technology is plagued with pollution problems—solid, liquid and airborne. We look forward to technology that would address these problems. But no matter how clean it may prove to be, that does not address the negative impacts of coal strip mining on our land and water.

During the past three decades, improved clean energy technology has brought us a new generation wind power, biofuels made from plant feedstock, energy efficient technologies, and simple conservation measures that are cost effective, reliable, and environmentally sound.

Montana's wind resource is rated fifth in the nation. The wind farm at Judith Gap will produce 135 megawatts of electricity at a cost less than NorthWestern Energy customers currently pay. Local residents and county officials are understandably supportive of the development that has brought an economic lift and good paying jobs to their area.

According to the National Biodiesel Board, production and consumption of biodiesel is expected to jump from 25 million gallons in 2004 to 75 million in 2005. Oilseed crops are, and can be, grown in a wide region of the country, providing diversity in crop choices, and contributing significantly to local economies.

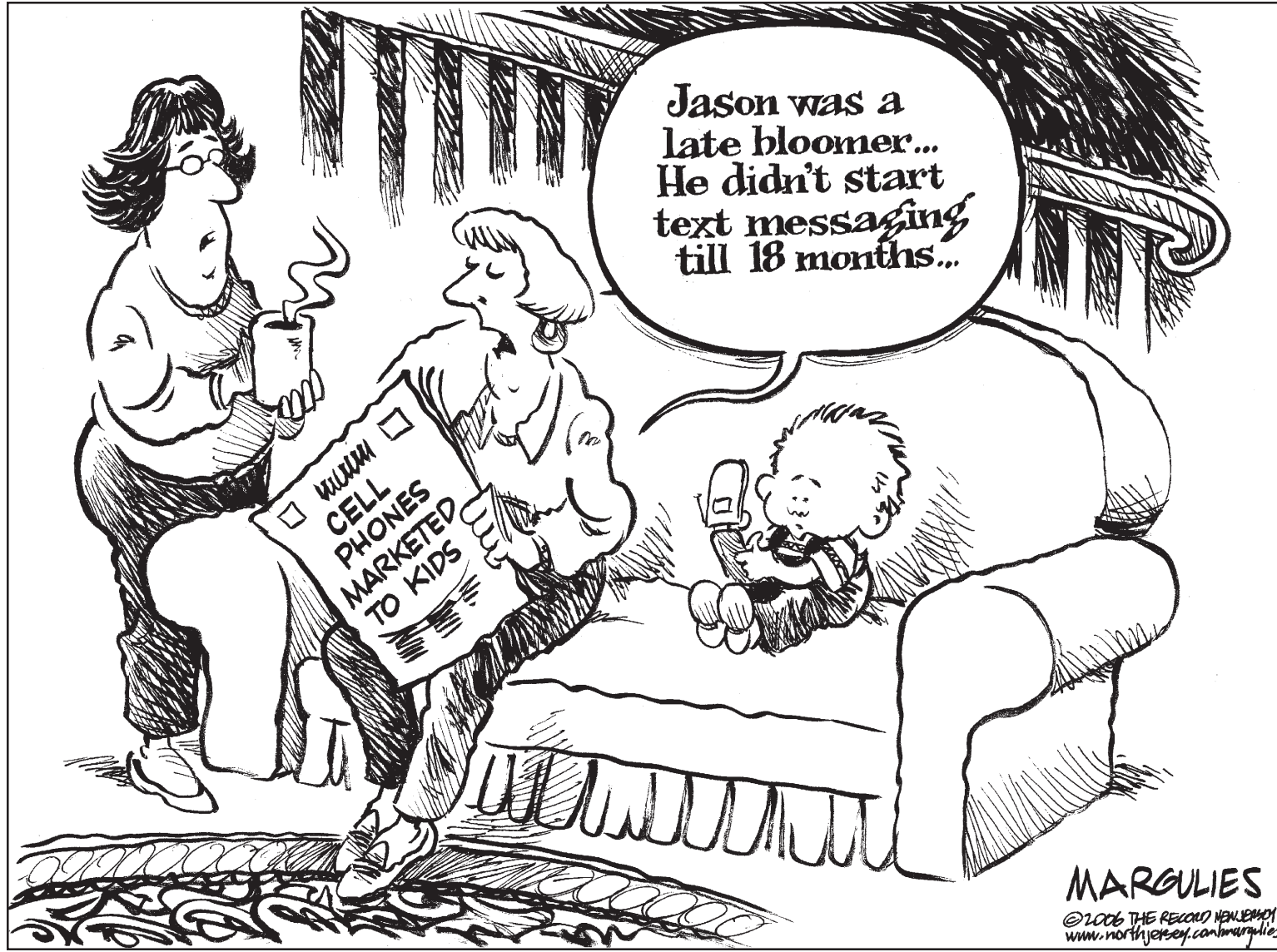
The states of Minnesota, North Dakota, Nebraska, Missouri and Iowa are aggressively pursuing a biodiesel economy. Public support of the use of biodiesel is a contributing factor, since it can fuel any standard diesel engine with little if any modification, yet produces many fewer particulate emissions. We need our elected leaders to pursue aggressively these economic and environmental benefits of renewable resources.

After all, the Stone Age didn't end because people ran out of stones! They found better ways of doing things. That fossil-fuel bridge called for in the '70s never materialized—now there are better ways. Improved technology has brought us to the era of renewable energy sources.

It is time to chart an energy course for the United States that is clean, reliable, affordable, and decentralized, and that can provide jobs and prosperity to numerous rural communities throughout this country.

Helen Waller and her family are wheat farmers near Circle, Mont., and she is a former chairwoman of the Northern Plains Resource Council.

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail jvannostrand@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com.



Dancing around the issue

I almost gave up on the common sense of the American public, but at the 11th hour it was proven solid.

For the past eight weeks I've followed competitors in the "Dancing with the Stars" prime time television show. Had former 98 Degrees pop singer Drew Lachey and partner Cheryl Burke not won I'd probably never watched another reality show of its kind.

It wasn't the dancing that was the problem it was the show's scoring system which almost failed. Fifty percent of each contestant's score came from professional dancers and the other 50 percent came from viewers.

I'd like to know how John Q. Public who has never stepped foot on a ballroom dance floor is qualified to weigh in at 50 percent of a contest. It's bunk in my books.

I grew up watching parents glide across the floor of many a dance, but that doesn't qualify me to tell you whether they danced to the proper technique and step.

Starting out in the "Dancing with the Stars" show were 10 professional dancers paired up with current or former music, television, acting or athletic personalities.

Included in the list and some of the first to be eliminated were ESPN sportscaster Kenny Mayne; actress Tatum O'Neal (who whined after being told goodbye); newscaster Giselle Fernandez; and actress Tia Carrere (who has to be admired for having joined the show only two months after giving birth).

Hanging on for weeks was George Hamilton, who could actually dance and actually entertained television viewers and a live audience, but then there was rap star Master P.

Had it not been for that 50 percent viewer scoring weight, Master P would have been long gone



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

from the show. Refusing to wear dance shoes and picking up his feet but being retained by viewers should have been a clue to show producers scoring needs to be revamped.

And last week's dump of talk-show host Lisa Rinna was pitiful. Rinna out danced Jerry Rice hands down, but Rice was kept afloat by his National Football League fame with fans.

Rice for weeks has literally shuffled across the floor while Rinna gracefully danced and entertained me. While I have nothing against football players taking up ballroom dancing, it goes back to the scoring which is tilted. There's no way Rice out danced Rinna and the judges, other contestants and viewers had to have known it as did I. The show's producers had to have known it as well.

My biggest let down by the show came Sunday when professional women's wrestler Stacy Keibler (whose legs of which I've never seen longer ones) was voted off in favor of Rice.

Sure, Rice was Mr. Gentleman of the show, as well as most improved dancer, but in no way did he out dance Keibler. Graceful not only on the floor, but Keibler was equally as graceful when she was voted off the show. Just what were American viewers thinking to vote off such a talented dancer of which the professional judges scored a perfect performance of the night?

Not only did the show make a mockery of the supposed equitable scoring system producers came up with, it mocked the performing arts as well. Producers should be ashamed they let an unqualified dancer such as Rice advance at the cost of those more skilled as Rinna and Keibler. Producers really need to rethink this show before they let such a travesty happen again.

But like I said, it's a good thing Drew Lachey and partner Cheryl Burke took home the mirrored ball trophy or I'd never watch another season of the show. I hope other viewers would have thought likewise.

Another 'should-have-never-happened' took place Sunday right there on prime time television.

It happened during the closing ceremonies of the Olympics.

Now tell me again what America's colors are. Aren't they red, white and blue? Then why were our athletes sporting the colors of black (or could have been navy blue) white, sky blue and baby blue?

Yep, right there walking around the field were athletes from the United States of America wearing parade sweaters in black (navy blue), white, sky blue and baby blue and the only red on them was some piping and a zipper. OK, they had red and white scarves draped around their necks, but I was disheartened and almost embarrassed to see them in the junk they were wearing.

The American Olympic team committee needs to hire a new designer and it needs to be done quickly. In fact, when I saw the outfits our athletes were wearing I thought to myself, 'I wonder what the official colors of the United Arab Emirates are?'

Legislators should continue momentum

From The Manhattan Mercury
Not so long ago, a three-year, \$500 million funding package for public schools in this state was unthinkable. Then again, not so long ago, a majority of the Kansas Legislature acted as if rhetoric alone would keep schools operating.

Thus, House Speaker Doug Mays and other House leaders are to be commended for the proposal they recently unveiled Thursday. Not only does Rep. Mays call it "a workable plan," but Senate Minority Leader Anthony Hensley said, "The way the process is moving now suits me just fine."

No less important than the details of the House plan — and they could prove devilish — is the

legislative consensus on the amount of money schools should have. The Kansas Senate is putting the finishing touches on a similarly ambitious plan, and most senators seem confident that compromise between the two versions will not prove elusive.

The House plan would inject \$175 million into public education the first year, adding \$165 million and \$160 million the second and third years, respectively. Base aid per pupil would rise \$50, there would be no change with regard to districts with low enrollments, and districts with large enrollments and six urban districts with high concentrations of poor students would re-

ceive additional money.

Notably, advocates say the package can be paid for without raising taxes, a vital political consideration.

Additionally, the bill would require districts to identify spending priorities and to shift money to areas deemed insufficient.

The \$500 million House package, despite its flaws and despite criticism from the plaintiffs who brought initial lawsuit, marks genuine progress toward a goal we hope all Kansans share.

This momentum this proposal generates is worth maintaining.

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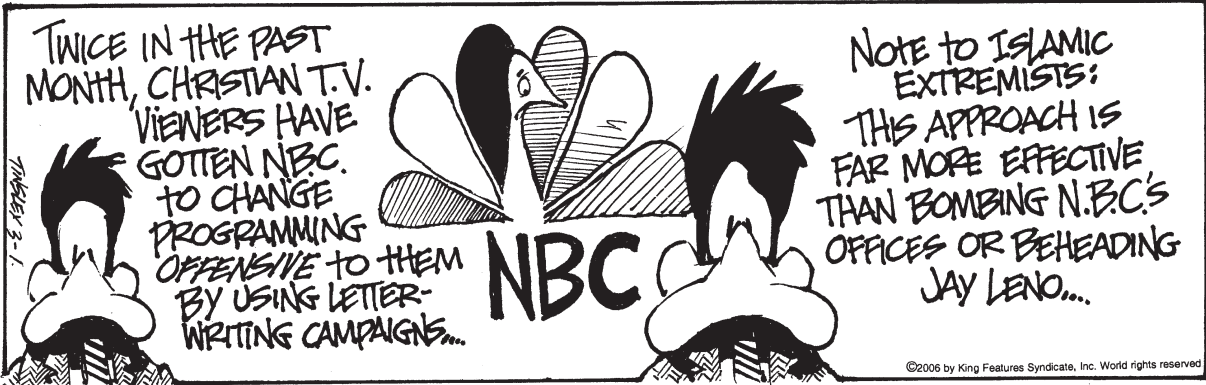
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