

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

Where is the leadership?

From The Wichita Eagle

The Kansas Sierra Club isn't endorsing either Gov. Kathleen Sebelius or Republican challenger Jim Barnett in the upcoming election — because neither has exhibited “environmental leadership,” according to the group's latest newsletter.

It has a point.

The governor recently told The Eagle editorial board that she is a big supporter of renewable energy, including wind, but it's fair to ask: What has she actually done during her term?

Not much, the Sierra Club points out. Her effort to moderate the controversy over siting wind power in the Flint Hills by setting up a regional buffer zone was, at best, a modest accomplishment.

Barnett has expressed support for renewables and their economic potential, but his record wasn't impressive enough to warrant the Sierra Club's support, either.

Among other things, the group would like to see Sebelius push for a renewable energy portfolio, which would require energy companies to develop a percentage of their energy from alternative sources such as wind and solar by a target date.

Renewable energy portfolios already have been adopted by 22 states, including Colorado and Texas. Kansas is regularly touted as a top state for wind potential — but states such as Iowa and Minnesota have surged ahead of us in realizing actual wind capacity. Why? In part because of their REP laws.

... The Sierra Club also called on Sebelius to impose a moratorium on several new coal-fired electric plants planned for the state. ...

Kansas needs to honestly scrutinize the impact of these plants, which critics say will increase mercury levels in the state by 60 percent, export most of their power to other states, take billions of gallons of water annually from the already depleted Ogallala Aquifer, and cut off incentives for developing wind and other cleaner future technologies for a generation.

These are important decisions: Kansas will be living with these coal-fired plants for the next 50 years.

... Environmental and energy policy decisions might not top voter concerns this election season, but they're of vital importance to Kansas' future.

Where is the leadership?

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. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

Where to write, call

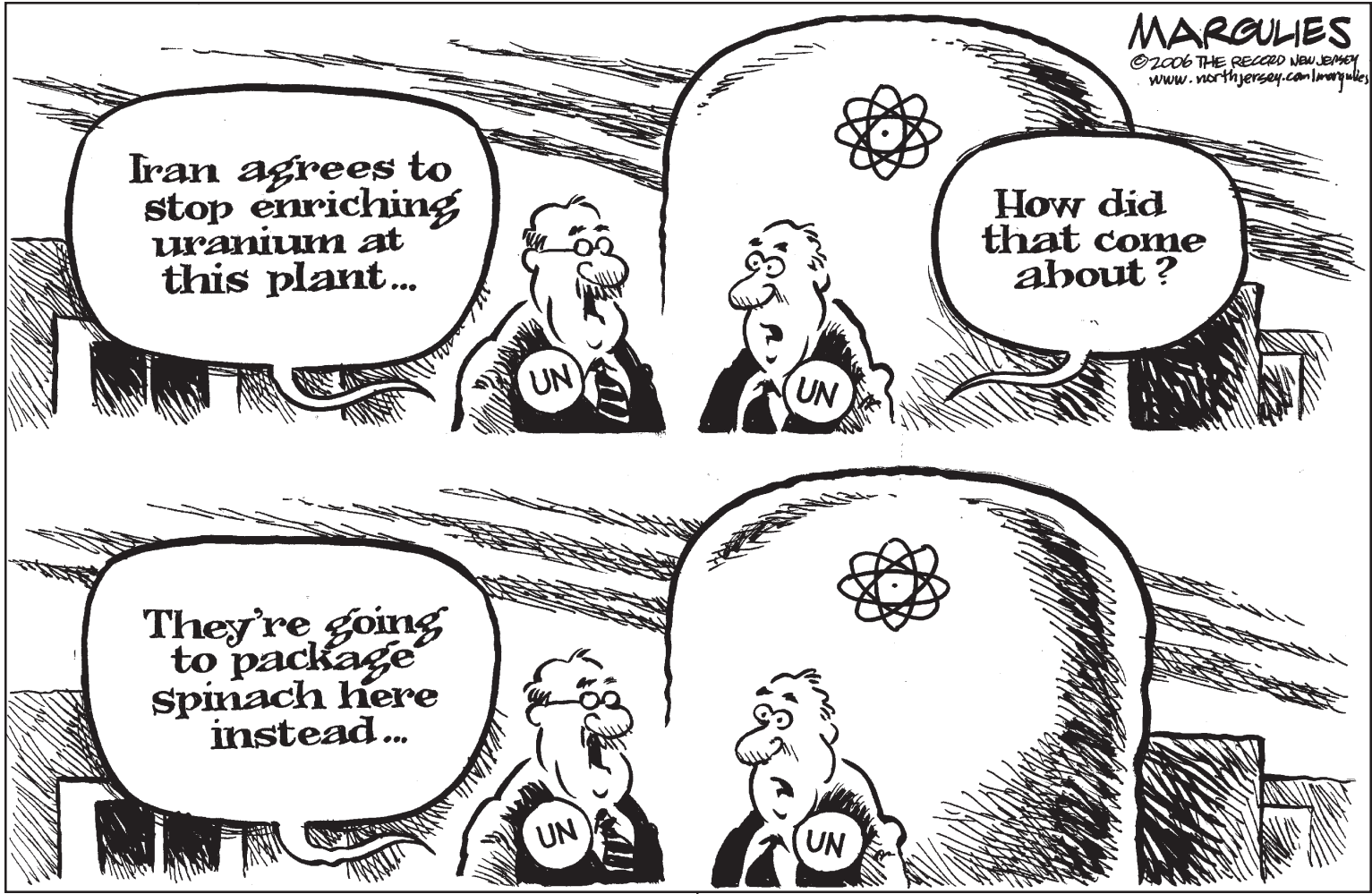
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U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 303 SW 10th St. Rm. 171-W, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676 e-mail: jmorrison@ink.org web: www.ink.org/public/legislators/jmorrison

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Dial M for maddening

I'm about ready to go back to smoke signals as a way to communicate.

If you are like me, you get tired of trying to figure out how cell phone companies do business. Short of discontinuing my service, for the life of me, I can't figure out why a company would outsource its accounting department.

Not only that, when asked about the practice, the customer service representative told me it's known the accounting firm makes mistakes, but that is “just part of doing business.”

If I headed that cell phone company I'd be asking myself how much that accounting firm is costing me in dissatisfied customer relations.

That's where I fit in. I changed rate plans two days after the billing cycle I'm assigned. Silly me, thinking the accounting department would not make a mistake in prorating part of the month's bill, I opted not to wait some 28 days to change plans so the bill didn't get messed up.

Well, it was messed up. Expecting a bill which was lower than the previous month's, the two-day-after-the-fact change ended with a bill \$40 more.

As with most cell phone companies, the service provider I have makes you pay one month in advance for service.

Well, since I changed plans mid-stream, the already paid amount was credited back to me. But get this, the new rate wasn't changed the first month, but was tacked onto the second month's bill, resulting in the higher charge.

Go figure, it's like cell phone companies are out to get you. One way or another, if you change anything it results in either more charges, differ-



Jan Katz Ackerman

- From Where I stand

ence rates than expected, or, of course, more taxes.

I spent nearly two hours on the phone with the head of the customer service department trying to get the bill straightened out. Yes, she got it done, and even gave me a \$10 customer inconvenience credit to boot.

All this still doesn't answer my question why the accounting department is outsourced. Especially when the first lady admitted she knew there were problems. Looks like the big wigs ought to figure out better accounting would result with happier customers and one willing to stay the long haul versus changing service providers.

Speaking of cell phones, as you probably know, for many years I've covered the court systems. Since Thomas County has such a large volume of drug cases, we prioritize those which involve drug sales near schools. But all this aside, I can't figure out why anyone would use a cell phone to set up a drug deal.

Don't those guys know the cops are smarter than they are? Nobody in their right mind would

use a cell phone to buy and sell drugs. I guess that's why so many get caught.

It's called unlawful use of a communication facility and it's a severity level 8 non person felony. That charge carries a penalty of seven to 23 months in prison and a fine up to \$100,000. That in itself should be enough to make someone think twice before dialing. Guess not.

But when I do get a court document with the charge of unlawful use of a communication facility on them, there is invariably a charge of no drug tax stamp also on the document.

That makes me giggle. That's one of the state's most goofy crimes.

A level 10 non person felony, not having a drug tax stamp and trying to sell drugs carries a penalty of five to 13 months in prison and a \$100,000 fine.

Wonder who laid awake nights and dreamed up that law? Well, I won't go there.

Picture this, John Q. Public goes to the county treasurer's office and asks to buy a drug tax stamp so he can go sell drugs. What a hoot.

Just out of curiosity, I asked Thomas County Treasurer Donita Applebury, Logan County Treasurer Kay Marcy and Sheridan County Treasurer Esther Bainter if they had ever sold a drug tax stamp and they all said no.

However, they all three assured me if they were approached by anyone wanting to buy a drug tax stamp they would be sure and call me, right after they called the police.

Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press.

Are you listening, Washington?

By Steve Haynes

Congress debates, the administration whines, the CIA wants this or that, but there ought to be a clear answer when it comes to torture.

No.

Sen. John McCain, tortured brutally during his years as a prisoner in Vietnam, knows the score. He's led the fight to get the U.S. away from any kind of prisoner abuse.

The war on terror is vital, yes, and the military and intelligence agencies need to interrogate captured terrorists. That should never involve torture, and hopefully the bill set to come out of Congress will set some clear guidelines.

Torture is not part of our heritage, though it once was common enough in what we like to call Western Civilization. Our constitution bans “cruel and unusual” punishment and gives criminals the right to refuse to answer questions.

The standard we uphold at home is good enough for us to uphold abroad.

One problem is defining torture.

Some of the excesses of Abu Ghraib amounted to nothing more than sophomoric pranks, while other approached and some passed the limit. There's no excuse for mistreating prisoners, but ours is one of the few armies in this world that actually punishes soldiers for stepping over the line.

That's one thing. Torturing prisoners, using pain to elicit answers, is wrong whenever and wherever it's done.

The United States should have no part in it. For one thing, prisoners will say about anything to stop torture, and the answers they give often are not accurate.

There are gray areas, too. Tactics aimed at disorienting prisoners and breaking down their will, such as leaving the lights on day and night or keeping a cell warm or cold, sometimes are lumped in with torture.

The CIA has kept key prisoners in secret lock-ups in eastern Europe, some inherited from the old Soviet regime Abu Ghraib itself, a notori-

ous Baghdad prison, came to us from Saddam Hussein.

Stalin, Lenin, Saddam.

Are those names we want to be associated with?

The Bush administration has tried to make its own rules as the war on terror evolved. That's no way for a nation to do business.

Torture is not part of our agenda. It can never be part of our agenda.

When, as happens in any war, soldiers get out of hand, the U.S. should do what it's always done: prosecute the violators and teach the rest a lesson.

When agencies want to go beyond what's acceptable, we the people need to make our will clear.

And that will does not include torture in any form.

Are you listening, Washington?

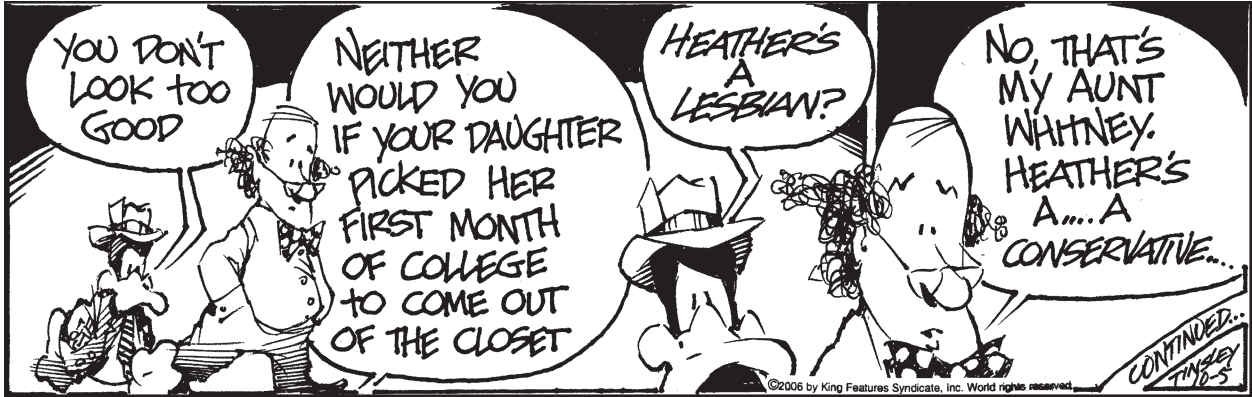
— Steve Haynes is owner of Nor'West Newspapers including the Colby Free Press

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Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley



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