# pinion



### Other **Viewpoints**

## Wind energy just winding up

Kansas has just tapped the tip of the wind turbine.

It now generates more than 1,000 megawatts of electricity with the wind farms that have gone online, and with the nation's third-greatest wind resource, there's plenty more where that came from.

But for Kansas to be the clean-energy pioneer it has the potential to be, more action is needed. For example, more incentives to bolster the development of wind and solar energy resources.

Kansas recently joined a small group of states that generate more than 1,000 megawatts of electricity from wind power but it is not at the top....

The steps lawmakers take now can set the stage for our future — a state known for being on the front edge of the next energy revolution, or a state lagging behind, still relying on coal-burning power plants.

Negotiators in the Legislature are finishing up a bill that would allow Sunflower Electric Power to build two 700megawatt generators at its existing plant near Holcomb. The focus on coal — which completely dominated last session and deterred work on other important issues — detracts from the push forward on renewable energy in the state.

It's true that the coal plants would offer some economic development, but so would more development of wind and solar power industries. Investment in renewable energy projects can mean prosperity for rural areas as the industry creates jobs.

And while the coal-plant legislation contains some green initiatives, renewable energy proponents rightly desire a bill for wind power that can stand on its own, without the taint of concession.

Kansas has a lot more to give, but it cannot realize its potential without the full commitment of the Legislature.

—The Hutchinson News via The Associated Press

#### Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774

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

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Room 143-N, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7676 e-mail: jmorriso@ink.org web: www.morrisonfamily.com

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW10th St., Room 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

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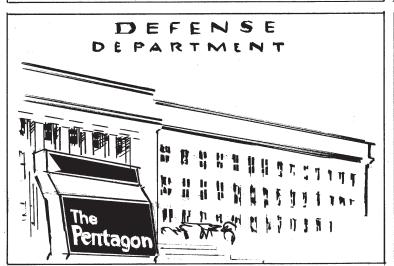
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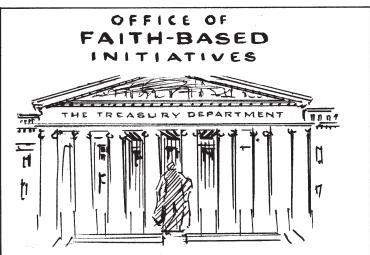
lins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties: 4 months \$53, 8 months \$65, 12 months \$82 . Other Kansas counties: 4 months \$60, 8 months \$70, 12 months \$85. All other states, \$85, 12 months.

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## Open government leads to good choices

Open government has power. It fuels democracy. When citizens know what's going on, they can make informed choices about their community and their country.

That sounds simple and noncontroversial. But open government isn't quite like apple pie and the Flag. In concept, everybody says they love it. In practice, that love too often morphs into secrecy.

Take the Kansas Open Records Act. The preamble states firmly and clearly that it's the policy of the state that public records should be open to the public. Then the act lists more than 45 exemptions.

Some of those are legitimate, covering personnel, medical and juvenile records. Some of them are special interest nonsense, such as the exemption that keeps secret information about employees of private companies whose salaries are paid with public money.

A quick example: You can get basic information, including names and salaries, of any public employees, such as school teachers, administrators and janitors. But you can't even find out the names of those who drive buses for Durham School Services, even though Durham receives tens of millions of tax dollars every year to haul thousands of our children to and from school every day in Wichita, Topeka and around the state.

islature, but our lawmakers won't touch it. Sadder yet is the pervasive attitude that

### **Opinions** Randy Brown

Other

Wichita State University transparency in government is inconvenient

and should be avoided if possible. The Wichita School District's long search for a new superintendent is a recent and disheartening example.

The district is the largest in the state by a wide margin. It is the largest local taxing body in the state, as well. Yet the school board conducted its search for a leader in secret. Under pressure, it finally let the public briefly in on the process when only two candidates remained, just days before the final selection

This is not illegal, but it's no way to build public trust in an agency with a \$600 million annual budget and a \$370 million bond issue on its plate.

Secrecy in public meetings is another transparency issue. Communities from around the state - from Lawrence and Topeka out This is clearly a public safety issue – and a to Thomas County – are running afoul of the brutal violation of the spirit of the Open Re- Kansas Open Meetings Act. The Lawrence cords Act. It easily could be fixed by the Leg- City Council was even sent to open govern- University, is executive director of the Kansas ment school last year.

One problem is the tendency of local gov-

erning bodies to pop into executive session at the slightest opportunity. When discussions veer off of a specified subject or decisions are reached, as sometimes happens, state law is violated. And so is the public interest.

As well meaning as most public officials are, another problem is ignorance of the law or sometimes just arrogance. State Sen. Tim Huelskamp, R-Fowler, says local officials frequently violate the open meetings law by discussing public business over lunch, in private meetings and in social settings. That's convenient, after all.

Two key points here:

Open government is about citizen access to the workings of democracy, nothing more or

Public officials gain something priceless when they do business in the sunshine: credibility and public trust.

In short, open government is essential to a democratic society. Yes, that can make things a bit messy. But then, democracy can be a messy

One of my favorite patriots, Patrick Henry, once said something like this: Liberty is never secure when government does business in se-

That's as true now as it was more than 225

Randy Brown, a senior fellow at the Elliott chool of Communication at Wichita State Sunshine Coalition for Open Government. For information, see www.sunshinecoalition.com.

## School funding a big part of budget

The Appropriations Committee has been working hard on the 2010 budget. The committee should be applauded for crafting a bill that takes the necessary steps to ensure that we are not continually faced with overwhelming debt as our economy struggles.

A lot has been misconstrued regarding the cuts to school funding. The committee worked hard to retain its commitment to children by capturing and using every federal stimulus dollar available for public education.

Parents and teachers should be encouraged that school money has remained a priority. While cuts to all areas were unavoidable, education received the smallest reduction of any state program. Based on total expenditures per pupil on a statewide average in 2008, the per pupil funding was only cut .002 of 1 percent

Total state spending, based on 2008 numbers, for public education (total spending includes administrative costs, etc.) is up 4.9 percent. Even though this represents a slight decrease from the 2009 level, education will be funded at a level much higher than two years ago. Ideally we would be able to fund all state services to their fullest extent.

However, with education making up more than half the budget, cuts are necessary so we don't completely destroy budgets in other areas such as social services, public safety, transportation, and the like. These agencies all play a vital role in the function of the state and our well-being as taxpayers.

Often, with additional federal support, such as money from Title 1, Kansas public schools will see more money than they did last year,



#### Jim Morrison

Capitol Review

even with the adjustments made in committee. It should also be noted that most districts have contingency funds, totaling over \$100 million, which are far greater than the reduction made in the 2010 budget.

We expect working the bill on the House floor about Wednesday. I will keep you updated and provide an overview of the bill later.

BIOSCIENCE RESEARCH A press conference was held Thursday to

update everyone on the new partnership that the Kansas Bio Science Authority is seeking with the National Bio Agro Defense facility in Manhattan. This facility and subsequent part-

nerships and investments are adding a needed boost to the Kansas economy.

Besides the highly publicized goals of protecting the nation's food supply and agricultural economy, the authority is working with the research facility to secure a National Cancer Center designation for the University of Kansas. The pursuit of this vision has emerged as another great opportunity for Kansas.

We are already known for our top tier pharmacy school at KU and are now set to use our clinical research organization and drug discovery and delivery expertise to expand significantly cancer research and care.

This type of investment keeps highly educated college graduates in the state, stimulates the Kansas economy and provides much needed services to the Kansans and the nation.

It is an honor to serve as your representative. My door is always open to discuss your cares and concerns. If you have any specific questions about the 2010 budget or anything else, please contact me.

## Groups say thanks for the coverage

To the Editor:

Thank you for the donation of two one-year subscriptions. Your donation helped make the carnival a huge success.

Mary Zerr Sacred Heart School To the Editor:

The Worship Committee of the Colby United Presbyterian Church would like to thank you for the Free Press's attention to the community's religious activities. It is much appreciated.

> Carol Rahn, pastor; Merle Wolf, Wynn Duffey, Peggy Saddler, Evan Barnum, Verna Schroeder.

### Mallard **Fillmore**

Bruce Tinsley

