

Other Viewpoints

Uncertainty dogs Sunflower's path to power

Uncertainty has been one undeniable constant in the proposed expansion of the Sunflower Electric Power Corp. plant at Holcomb.

Questions and controversy have swirled around an expansion plan for years, pitting supporters intent on seeing a bigger facility built to meet growing energy demand while delivering a welcome boost to the local economy against detractors determined to derail the project due to emissions from the coal-fired power plant.

Earlier proposals — including a recent one to add two 700-megawatt units — stalled, but a deal brokered in 2009 by Gov. Mark Parkinson cleared the way for a scaled-down expansion featuring one new 895-megawatt unit. With something for both sides, the deal also included a renewable energy standard requiring Kansas utilities to generate 20 percent of their power from renewable sources by 2020.

While it's easy to look at the expansion plan and see a repeat of the same arguments, there are significant differences this time around.

Beyond the obvious change in the scope of the project, it's necessary to consider how federal regulations might affect such power plants in the future.

As before, the public will have multiple opportunities to learn more and offer input.

Sunflower has planned a pair of open houses to allow citizens to ask questions and better understand the project's economic benefits, environmental issues, the permitting process, air quality and different technologies needed to meet federal regulations....

Uncertainty has indeed clouded the proposed expansion since Day 1, making the issue all the more frustrating.

And it would be easy to tire of the ongoing debate over the Sunflower plant expansion.

But with so much at stake, citizens still have ample cause to pay attention and even engage in the discussion over a plan that, if realized, would affect people in many ways.

— *The Garden City Telegram, 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 274-W, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7676 e-mail: jmorriso@ink.org

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St., Room 225-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7399 ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

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Steve Haynes - Publisher
s.haynes@nwkansas.com

NEWS

Kevin Bottrell - News Editor
kbottrell@nwkansas.com

Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter
aheintz@nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansas.com

Vera Sloan and Aubrey Spencer - Society Editors
colby.society@nwkansas.com

ADVERTISING

Heather Woolfer - Advertising Representative
hwoolfer@nwkansas.com

Andrea Miller - Advertising Representative
a.miller@nwkansas.com

Kathryn Ballard - Graphic Design
kballard@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Robin Tubbs - Office Manager
rtubbs@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager

Lana Westfahl, Jim Jackson, Betty Morris, Jim Bowker, Judy McKnight, Barbara Ornelas, Kris McCool

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Moving day can drive you crazy

Lots of people seem to be moving this week, bringing to mind some of the observations and philosophies I've collected on the subject over the years.

I never moved until I was an adult, though I've moved a lot since. Maybe because I grew up with just one house — two if you count my grandmother's — I never learned to get rid of things. After all, an unfinished sewing project, put away, was not a problem as it waited five years to be resurrected. There was always room for just a little more in the drawer or on the shelf. It's only when things have to be dug out, packed up, carried to a truck, hauled away, carried in, stacked, unpacked, put away....

The critical moment comes after the box is opened, the contents are taken out, and the reality hits that there's no place to put that project anymore, or the built-in shelf that held knick-knacks was left behind, or that this whatchamacallit which has been part of your life for so many years really is uglier than you remember.

Then you start wondering how many other things you moved that you should have had on your garage sale last week. You either begin a pile or go quietly crazy as piece after piece turns up. If you recognized all this before you packed it, you could have used a smaller truck.

Moving day is when you discover who your



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

friends are. After all, it takes a certain level of dedication to give up free time to haul someone else's soon-to-be-garage-sale items across town. I understand that there are people out there who use professionals to move, but it's far more entertaining as a do-it-with-your-friends proposition.

Moving day is also when you discover the limits of your physical — not to mention mental — endurance. You get up too early. You frantically start that last-minute packing, which has grown exponentially huge since the night before. You discover you have too little time, too few boxes, and too much stuff that should have gone in the trash months ago.

As the moving itself starts, new horrors come to light. Under beds and in the back of children's closets fossils come to light, artifacts of things you'd rather not know about.

Closing your eyes to the mess, you start grabbing boxes. Within 10 minutes you discover

muscles you had forgotten you had. Within an hour, you discover levels of pain you would prefer not to know. Remember, you're still in your old house.

Getting to the new house carries all the fun of furniture that won't go through the door, boxes with hidden or missing labels and kids who want to sit down and unpack their toys right in the path of the six burly guys you recruited to carry the couch and piano.

Once the burly guys and the truck and the tramping back and forth are done, there is quiet. Not a peaceful quiet. In fact, silence in the face of a head-high tower of boxes on three sides of the room is more — ominous. That kid who wanted to play in the doorway now wants to be fed. There are no pans — or dishes — or forks — anywhere but at the bottom of that tower of boxes. The top layer, of course, contains baby souvenirs and Christmas decorations.

Our office manager, Robin Tubbs, who just moved, says she has her kitchen, bedrooms and bathrooms already unpacked, though the tower of boxes remains. Sounds like she's getting ready for that post-move garage sale.

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

Harvest brings 14-hour days

It's 10 a.m. and the sun blazes down on a patchwork of golden grain that dots the High Plains near Seguin in northwestern Kansas. A blistering southerly wind pushes the heat index to the century mark.

On this late-June morning, a roar of combines signals the beginning of another wheat harvest. Cutting begins about this time each day and continues until midnight, or when the golden grain becomes too moist or tough to cut.

Fifteen-minute meal breaks are the only time off in a 14-hour workday. Although the days seem to last forever, technology has made life easy compared to the dusty, itchy harvests of yesteryear, when farmers sat on open-air seats and ate dust while sweat ran down their faces.

Today's monster machines look more like tanks rolling through a war game. All across Kansas, farmers pilot these 12-ton machines as easily as the family car. Modern combines come complete with contoured seats, sound-proof cabs wrapped in tinted glass, air conditioning and stereo. Computers monitor the entire operation.

Equipped with dual brakes, power steering and automatic transmission these machines move through the fields at speeds of 5-miles-per-hour or more, depending on yield and field conditions. One machine can harvest 4,000 bushels of wheat on a good day.

Ask any farmer and he'll tell you there's nothing like cutting a field of wheat where the crop bunches up in the header and slows the combine to a crawl. Yields like that make farming and harvest fun.

And with crops like that, it doesn't take long to fill up the bin. It's then the grain cart waddles up next to the combine and 300 bushels of wheat is augured into the cart on the go.

It takes several hands to operate a harvest crew. Many producers operate one or two combines, a tractor operator pulls the grain cart



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

and another couple fellows to drive the semis, loaded with wheat, to and from the field.

There's also usually one farmer who oversees or ramrods the wheat harvesting operation. He's busy keeping an eye on moisture levels, making sure the machines are operating smoothly or lining up the next field to be harvested.

Farmers hate days when weather changes and the sun ducks in and out of the clouds. On such days they baby sit the crop.

They test a field. Then move to another down the road, hoping to find wheat dry enough to harvest. No wonder farmers have been known to cuss the weather.

If and when harvest roars ahead full speed, it can be a frenzied time. Cutting the wheat and transporting this precious grain to the elevator or bin becomes the ultimate prize.

Man and machine race to beat the clock and weather. A storm with heavy rain, hail or damaging winds is every farmer's worst nightmare and the possibility of such natural disasters is ever present during harvest.

Still, harvest is an event of beauty — the culmination of nearly nine months of growth, rejuvenation of the land and the ultimate prize — an abundant crop of golden grain. Seems like there are always moments of reflection when harvest is running smoothly, the crop is a good one and a farmer has time to stick his hands into a mound of wheat and pop a few kernels into his mouth. It's at times like this, he'll look out over the land he loves, where the machines

are moving through clouds of dust and chaff.

"You gotta take what's given you in this country," they'll think to themselves while chewing the wheat that's by now turned to gum. "Some year, what you receive is better than others."

A Kansas farmer takes risk that tests the strength of his spirit. He faces harvest with the hope of bounty. He makes his peace with God and keeps that same peace with his neighbor. Faced with the annual trials of raising a wheat crop, this is the only way a Kansan would choose to live — with himself or anyone else.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Write us

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Before an election, letters (other than responses by a candidate) will not be published after the Thursday before the polls open.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

