



Free Press Viewpoint

'Clean' changes; power use doesn't

Clean power. What does that mean? Depends on the tenor of the times. Fifteen to 20 years ago, for instance, environmentalists were protesting anything to do with nuclear power. Development of nuclear plants stopped cold.

Nuke plants created the worst type of pollution, opponents said, radioactive wastes that we had no plans to deal with. State after state rejected plans to build storage sites for material that would be "hot" for centuries. None has been built yet, though nuclear wastes remain in storage, the containers rotting way.

Coal, the once and future king of energy, returned to the fore. Hundreds of steam plants were built. Giant cranes stripped away the soil of central Wyoming. Dozens of trains left the coal fields each day to feed hungry power plants.

Then someone decided that it was carbon dioxide and other "greenhouse gasses" that we had to fear. Suddenly, coal was the enemy and nuclear plants were back in vogue. We'll figure out a way to hide those wastes, just you see.

In Europe, nuclear plants are already under development. In the U.S., the administration is pushing for a resumption of design and construction. Nothing has happened yet. No waste disposal site is being built.

Some coal plants, under pressure from environmentalists, will convert to natural gas, which burns cleaner, producing mostly water and less carbon dioxide in the exhaust. Wind, solar and geothermal plants will add to the mix, and coal will be dethroned.

Such is the way things are when we follow our emotions. The "best science" of the day has a way of morphing into yesterday's old news.

But can we really depend on nuclear plants to supply the power we need? Or wind? Or the sun?

No one really knows. The truth is, we need to consume less energy. Americans are just energy hogs, but no one wants to be without things our grandparents never dreamed of, air conditioning and big cars and huge houses.

But nuke plants do produce waste, and someone will have to provide a place to bury it. Even natural gas produces carbon dioxide. Any energy plant produces heat. Any transfer to energy from one place to another moves that heat, affecting weather and eventually, climate, at both ends.

"Clean" coal plants are far better than older coal plants, but still dirty. That may be progress, but ... any kind of plant has its own impact. We know not what that may be today, and care less if the new plant is "cleaner." But someday, we will have to pay the price. It won't be cheap.

Someday, too, advancing technology will give us better ways to use nuclear fuel, wind, the sun, and yes, even coal. Maybe that will save us, or maybe just add to our doom.

And we'll still not have a place to take the nuclear wastes. Who wants it?

This energy problem has no easy answers. — Steve Haynes

Write us

The Colby Free Press encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

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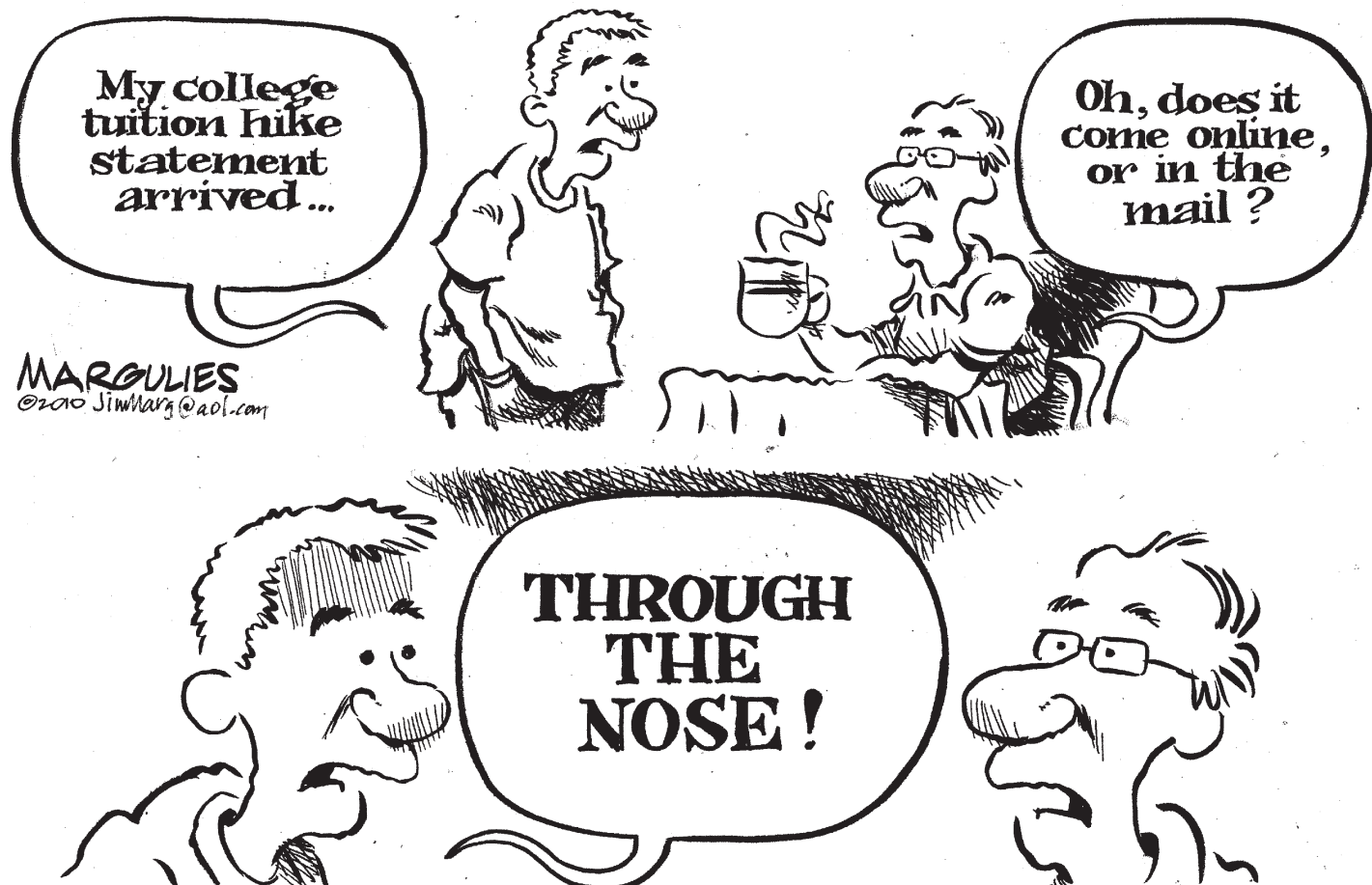
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4-H demands a lot – from parents

We do the darndest things for our kids.

I have a friend who just got out of the hospital. She had spent five days in the heat and humidity helping her children with their 4-H projects during the county fair.

She said she really, really tried to drink plenty of water, but her two busy boys have livestock and other projects that required a lot of work. She just got dehydrated.

She acknowledged that she knew what was happening, so the day after the end of the fair, she went into the emergency room and told them she was a couple of quarts low.

Two liters of normal saline later, she was ready to go again.

The next week, this same friend got a present from a co-worker – a nice grasshopper.

She was ecstatic. She said she would take it right home and put it in the freezer.

This brought up a less-than-Martha-Stewart moment in my mind as I saw her taking a package of pork chops and a side of grasshoppers out of the freezer for supper.

No, she explained, the grasshopper is part of next year's entomology project for her sons'



Cynthia Haynes

- Open Season

4-H work.

You've got to get going in the fall on collecting bugs, she explained, because some of them are just not available until the autumn, and by then the fair is over. So, she continued, as the little monsters show up – the bugs that is – they are popped into plastic containers and stored in the freezer.

I mentioned this to my friend May, whose children were all in 4-H, and she nodded wisely, noting that she used carbon tetrachloride on her insect collection, but those days are gone. It's been banned by the government.

Another friend told me the story of her 4-H disaster. Her children do photography, she explained.

Since it's the digital age, she got a nice printer for their art. It works great, she said, but the pictures must be sprayed with a fixer so the image won't yellow or fade.

The first time she tried helping a child with a picture, she got fixer on her hands and then got stuck to the print.

Since the fixer was so good at sticking things, she figured she could use it to fix the 20-year-old headliner of her car, which was coming down.

She sprayed and pushed, she said, and parts of the liner stuck to the top of the car. The rest just disintegrated or stuck to her fingers.

That was the last time she tried to use the fixer to fix anything but photos, she said. Seems she had bits of grey fabric stuck to her fingers for days.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes @ nwkansas.com

Diverse education offers 'different box'

No Chinese researcher, educated in China, researching in China, has received a Nobel Prize in science. The U.S. has over 270 Nobels, although admittedly some researchers were refugees educated in other countries.

And while the Nobel Prize is not an absolute indicator of a good educational system, it is a general indicator of a system that allows creativity. A country with many Nobels will likely have more creative engineering and industrial applications.

When asked to lecture on this China-U.S. difference, I examined the lives of many Nobel-Prize winners. I found factors that it would be wise for Kansas to consider before adopting the Common Core national curriculum.

Richard P. Feynman was a brilliant young physicist and mathematician recruited by Oppenheimer to lead the mathematical work on the Manhattan Project that built the atomic bomb. Older Americans will remember him dunking a rubber O-ring into a glass of ice water during the investigation into the first Space Shuttle explosion. But he was valuable to me because he remembered details of his education in short biographical essays in the book "Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman."

In the chapter titled "A Different Box of Tools," Feynman recalls his high school physics teacher, Mr. Bader:

"One day he told me to stay after class. 'Feynman,' he said, 'you talk too much and you make too much noise. I know why. You're bored. So I'm going to give you a book. You



John Richard Schrock

- Education Frontlines

go up there in the back, in the corner, and study this book, and when you know everything that's in this book, you can talk again...."

"That book also showed how to differentiate parameters under the integral sign – it's a certain operation. It turns out that's not taught very much in the universities.... The result was, when guys at MIT or Princeton had trouble doing a certain integral, it was because they couldn't do it with the standard methods they had learned in school.... So I had a great reputation ... only because my box of tools was different from everybody else's...."

Having a different box of tools was an important factor behind this Nobel Prizewinner, father of quantum electrodynamics (a concept Einstein never could understand). It illustrates the academic freedom and responsibility that was unique to American teachers: deciding what, when and how to teach. In today's world of state standardized education, what teacher can risk having a student that is not nose-to-grindstone on the pathway to studying for the assessments? The national Common Core curriculum, to be followed by a national common

core test, will complete the de-professionalization of teaching.

Because there is a lag period between K-12 and the post-graduate frontier of research, today's Nobel Prizewinners were still educated before the jack-booted educational mandates that were imposed after "Nation at Risk." We are already seeing the damage done to narrow the curriculum and stamp out diversity in teaching.

Only three of last November's nine science Nobel Prizewinners were educated in the U.S.

Other countries that have national curricula throughout their history have seen the bad effects of standardized curricula and are moving to get away from this cookie-cutter standardization.

Only in America do we ignore our history of success and deliberately destroy the diversity that has served us so well. Educationists are slamming down their fists and demanding that everyone have the same box of tools. Our many bright and creative young children, our future "Feynmans," deserve better.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.



Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

