

Other Viewpoints

Power need points to expanding plant

Expansion of the Sunflower Electric Power Corp. at Holcomb, and the many millions of dollars in economic impact it would bring, have been impossible to ignore.

Dollars tied to the plan have been a topic of interest for years, including a study on the financial impact compiled in late 2005 by a former economics professor at Fort Hays State University.

That study addressed the economic fallout of adding two 650-megawatt plants to the Holcomb facility. Since then, the plan has changed.

And now, we find that a more recent study on the revised expansion plan – one that calls for a single, 895-megawatt unit – shows the project delivering roughly the same in economic activity.

It is worth noting that the recent study was commissioned by the American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity, of which Sunflower Electric is a member, and conducted by staff in Kansas State University's Department of Agricultural Economics.

Among benefits of adding the 895-megawatt unit, according to the study and Sunflower:

- An estimated 1,900 jobs during the peak of construction, contributing to nearly \$400 million in total income.
- More than 80 permanent jobs, with an annual payroll of about \$6.5 million.
- Combined annual state and local tax revenue of more than \$41 million.

We would expect opponents of the project to question the validity of a study from an organization that counts Sunflower among its members. In a debate with no end, opponents also argue against another coal-fired power plant at a time many believe the technology should be shelved – especially as such renewable energy sources as wind gain momentum.

Yet supporters rightly see the project as a way to provide more affordable electricity consumers need, with the added benefit of jump-starting the local economy. If any coal plants need to be shut down, it's the old and inefficient ones, not this one.

As particulars of the project and utility needs in the region have evolved, one thing has not changed: The Sunflower plant expansion will put more money in western Kansas cash registers and grow the tax base in a region that sure needs a boost.

Folks on both sides of the issue should find it easy to warm up to that fact.

– *The Garden City Telegram, via the Associated Press*

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Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

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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 Shelby Pulkrabek - Society Editors
colby.society@nwkansas.com

ADVERTISING

Andrea Bowers - Advertising Representative
abowers@nwkansas.com

Kathryn Ballard - Advertising Representative
kb Ballard@nwkansas.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design
khunter@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, Kris McCool

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The REPUBLICANS and DEMOCRATS TRY TO WORK THINGS OUT...



Though unlikely, bipartisan effort needed

The American people's votes represented a widespread rejection of President Barack Obama and the Democratic agenda.

Those of us who lean to the left on most issues shouldn't ignore this fact. And despite our serious disagreements with Republicans, we should pressure our Democratic leaders to work with conservatives if they offer realistic ways of cutting the federal deficit that won't decrease our already shrinking middle class.

But given the propaganda campaign of lies and distortion waged on the president, it is hard to see any serious bipartisan compromise taking place.

It is hard to understand politics in America these days if you don't factor in the power of image-shaping and clever propaganda. The success of politicians and the policies they propose is based more on public relations campaigns and slick advertising than anything resembling reality.

Take senior voters who supported the "tea party" in the midterm elections. This movement earned a lot of its support from the nation's elderly, but many of those railing against socialism and arguing that the health-care bill is unconstitutional are the same people who loudly complain when anyone talks about making cuts to Social Security or Medicare. Matt Taibbi of *Rolling Stone Magazine* gives a perfect illustration of this strange paradox he witnessed while covering a tea-party event called the National Quartet Convention in Louisville, Ky., where former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin was the big draw.

While Palin was offering her usual slew of catch phrases and abstract sound bites like fish food to a hungry group of piranhas, Taibbi no-



Andy Heintz

Wildcat Ramblings

ticed that about every third person in the place seemed to be driving a motorized wheelchair scooter. Finally someone helpfully told him the scooters were paid for by Medicare.

"They have commercials down here, 'You won't even have to pay for your scooter! Medicare will pay,'" the allegedly anti-government, free-market purist said. "Practically everyone in Kentucky has one."

This comment provides a perfect snapshot of the inherent contradictions in American politics right now. People seem to have no problem passionately protesting any and all government spending while convincing themselves that the public benefits they receive are somehow a special exception to this rule.

But many seniors who voted in tea-party candidates to prevent massive government spending seem unwilling or unable to admit that maintaining Medicare and Social Security requires the massive government spending that their favored candidates so staunchly oppose.

This bizarre self-contradictory behavior shows that politics in this country is rooted in something that can't be fixed with bipartisan compromise or major changes in policy. We live in a hostile us-versus-them culture. There is a deeply ingrained belief that Obama and his

liberal allies represent exotic, non-American beliefs that threaten core American principles. This forces a knee-jerk animosity to liberal politicians, no matter what their actual positions are.

Today's huge federal deficit is going to bring about more calls to privatize Social Security and make substantial cuts to Medicare. To a passionate supporter of both programs, it's frustrating to see older voters help elect the people most likely to cut their benefits.

For years, Social Security and Medicare have made sure the elderly of wouldn't have to suffer the ravages of poverty after a lifetime of hard work. America's support for these programs has provided a necessary counterbalance to the uglier side of the free market.

Perhaps my worries are off base, and conservatives will refrain from making deep cuts in Social Security and Medicare. But their current pushes to repeal health care reform and extend tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans certainly has me thinking otherwise.

Nicholas Kristof, in an op-ed column for the *New York Times*, writes that nonpartisan economists say that extending tax cuts for the rich and repealing health-care reform would add over \$800 billion to the deficit over the next decade. What cuts will counterbalance this lost revenue?

It's hard to believe Social Security and Medicare will not be on the list.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

Stow the phone while driving

Self absorbed. It's all about me. I am the center of the universe.

All of these words come to mind when I see today's endless stream of motorists talking, tweeting, twittering and Face booking while speeding down the boulevard. This recent phenomenon has become epidemic and it's spreading.

Harsh words?

Certainly, but there are harsh consequences in lives lost, bodies maimed or injured permanently in traffic accidents caused by those who place their own need to continually use their phone before focusing on the task at hand – driving safely and consciously.

In 2008, the National Highway Traffic Safety Association estimated 11 percent of drivers on the road were using some type of phone. I live and drive to work and school every day in Manhattan, and from the number of phone users I see each day, I'd bet 40 percent are distracted while driving by a phone of some sort in one of their mitts. The other holds a mascara brush, a hamburger, a liter of water or an electronic reading device (Kindle, Nook, etc.) while they steer with their knees.

Recent research at Virginia Tech revealed an almost three-fold increase in the odds of crashing or nearly crashing when dialing a handheld phone while driving. Risk associated with text messaging may be much higher, based on a new study of truck drivers. The main finding here was a 23-fold increase in the odds of crashing, nearly crashing or drifting from a travel lane among truckers who texted while driving.



John Schlageck

Insights Kansas Farm Bureau

Whatever happened to conscientious and courteous driver of yesteryear?

How many motorists today continually scan the road and sidewalks in front of them for kids biking or walking down the sidewalk? How about a watchful eye for the elderly couple out on an early morning stroll? Or someone else walking his or her dog?

Such conduct while driving today has become the exception rather than the rule. Did I mention before that driving today is all about me getting where I need to go?

What about laws against such driving habits? Would they help?

The specter of Big Brother riding on your shoulder or the threat of a policeman or highway patrolman pulling you over and writing a ticket isn't much of a deterrent.

Creating more laws banning cell phone use while driving will not ensure people put them away. The problem is enforcement.

This would mean law enforcement types would have to ticket such offenders – and we'd need more of them to do so. We'd also need more streets because the ones we have would be impassable because of all the parked offenders and enforcement vehicles.

There's never a phone in my car. Don't need one. Don't want one. My car functions the way it was intended to without one. Anyway I need to be ever vigilant looking out for all those motorists who are doing everything else in their cars but driving.

What we need on our streets and highways today are motorists who understand when you crawl behind the wheel, your undivided attention is required.

This means no phone calls, no meals and no makeup.

Just drive.

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.

Where to write, call

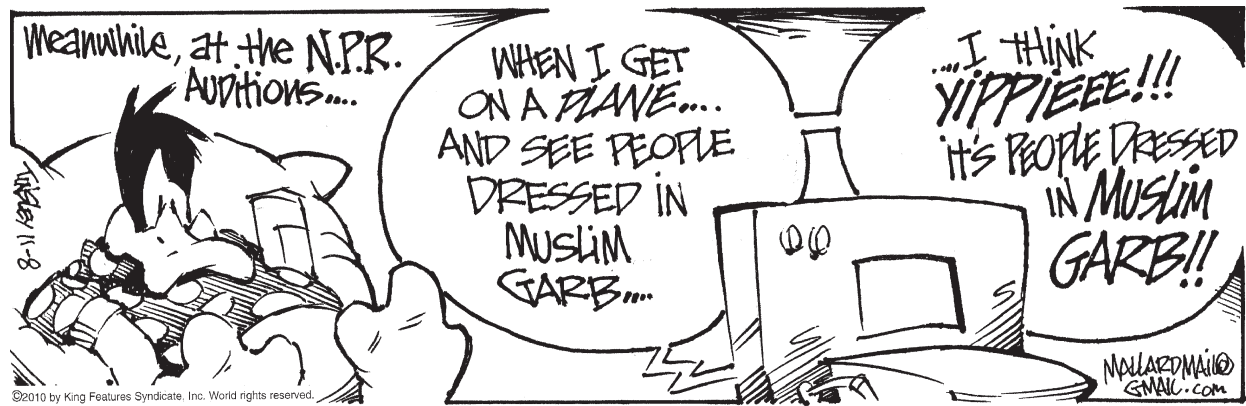
U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774

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

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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