

Other Viewpoints

Bremby firing seems suspicious

Kansans deserve more information about Gov. Mark Parkinson's firing of Health and Environment Secretary Rod Bremby, reportedly after Bremby declined a job in the gubernatorial transition.

While it's true that governors can hire and fire cabinet secretaries as they like, and departures are to be expected as Parkinson prepares to leave office in January, the timing of Bremby's unexplained removal fuels suspicion that it involved the pending state permit for Sunflower Electric Power Corp.'s 895-megawatt coal-fired power-plant expansion near Holcomb.

If so, that would raise questions about whether Parkinson's top priority was protecting Kansans' health and environment, or protecting his 2009 deal with Sunflower and pro-plant lawmakers to allow a modified expansion.

When Parkinson negotiated the agreement five days into his tenure — ending the painful and increasingly pointless two-year standoff over the plant and other energy initiatives between the Legislature and former Gov. Kathleen Sebelius — part of the agreement was to limit Bremby's power to deny an air permit for the scaled-down \$2.8 billion project based on concerns about carbon emissions. Now, people are wondering whether Parkinson sacked Bremby to make sure KDHE issued the permit before Jan. 2, when new federal rules for greenhouse-gas emissions take effect.

If the firing was meant to pre-empt a permit denial or expedite approval — and again, Kansans aren't being told one way or another — it would be a marked departure from how the process is supposed to work.

Sebelius told *The Wichita Eagle* editorial board in mid-2007 that she opposed a Holcomb expansion but would leave the decision to Bremby. Then in October 2007, Bremby denied the plant a permit, gaining national attention by linking the denial to "emerging information about the contribution of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases to climate change and the potential harm to our environment and health."

Two months ago, Parkinson denied that he was doing anything to delay or accelerate the permit process, noting that showing bias in either way would make the process "vulnerable" to legal challenge.

Though this editorial board supported Parkinson's deal, there are still plenty of questions about whether the plant will or should be built, especially given that Colorado utility Tri-State Generation and Transmission says it has no current need for the power. But if Bremby's firing was to prevent another denial or ensure a permit dodges new federal rules, Parkinson will have done what the Legislature tried and failed to do — prevent the state's top environmental regulator from doing his job of protecting Kansas.

— *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*

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Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form.

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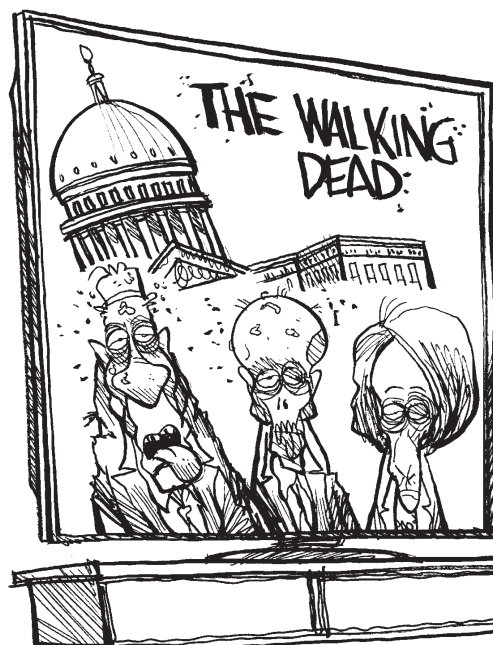
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Does showing up make you a hero?

One of those memorable quotes I've heard reference to several times in the last few weeks goes something like "80 percent of success is just showing up" (widely attributed to Woody Allen).

The older I get, the more true that seems.

In reading through all the materials sent to the paper honoring Veteran's Day — a lot more than we actually were able to publish — I found myself thinking of that maxim.

My Dad was a World War II vet. He never talked about it much, at least not to me. He never joined a veteran's organization.

What he did was get off the ship in San Diego, come home, get married and start raising a family.

He didn't march in parades, but he always bought a poppy and he always took off his hat or put his hand over his heart when the flag passed by.

The politicians, especially, who write and speak about Veteran's Day, seem to refer to every soldier or sailor, every veteran, as a hero. It doesn't matter to them if the individual spent several years peeling potatoes and driving a supply truck — the uniform earns them "hero" status.

Maybe they are right. But my Dad never thought of himself as a hero. He was just a guy who showed up, did his job and came home again.

What is a hero? Is it the sheriff in the old Westerns who show up with guns blazing? Not to the Indians who lost their homes, suffering disease and starvation as a foreign race



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

invaded the West.

Is the hero the guy who leads the cavalry charge up the hill? Maybe, but he's probably a dead hero.

Is the hero the doctor or nurse or chaplain who keeps going past the point of endurance to total exhaustion as casualties pile up and supplies are used up? To the wounded, they matter a lot.

Or is the hero just the person who shows up?

It's not a word reserved for battlefields or soldiers. It is, truth be told, a label that's more than a little overused. A teacher who rescues her class from a gun-wielding terrorist is a hero; a teacher who exercises patience in coaching a slow reader is doing his job. That may seem heroic to the child, but it's a bit of a stretch.

While often used for great physical deeds that save others, it should be apparent to anyone that few members of the military ever find themselves in the position of rescuing a battalion or single-handedly fighting off an entire enemy force. Not to denigrate the value of their service, but many never see combat.

Those that do have made the observation that war is 99 percent boredom and one percent sheer terror.

Don't get me wrong. I appreciate veterans. But what I most appreciate about them is probably the "showing up" part.

The mental image I have of a hero is the person who leads the charge and comes home to a parade and a medal. After that, it's over — a one-time shot at 15 minutes of fame.

The person who shows up, though, is forming a habit. They keep showing up — when they don't feel like going to work in the morning, when the day's job promises to be difficult or painful, when they feel like they are losing ground.

I honor the veterans who came home, got off the plane, and found war protesters waiting, but got back to school, back to work, back to living — showing up day after day.

I honor the veterans who came home and discovered their jobs or their families or their neighborhoods changed beyond recognition — but kept showing up, rebuilding their lives and contributing to their communities.

I honor the veterans who came home, got off the boat, and got on with their lives.

I honor my Dad, my uncles, my brother. I don't know if you are heroes or not, but thank you for showing up.

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.

Truth is, Sunflower process will be fair

A common claim over the last week is that I have preordained the Kansas Department of Health and Environment's approval of the Sunflower permit to expand its coal plant at Holcomb. That is untrue.

I want Kansans to know two things: First, the department will conduct the review in a fair, thorough and independent manner. It will approve or deny the permit based on the law and the facts and not based on unfair input. Second, I want Kansans to know that I can't wait for the post-review litigation of the permit process. That review will demonstrate the fairness of the process the department is undertaking, whether it approves or denies the permit.

When evaluating the permit application, what I have told the acting secretary is simply this: I don't care whether you approve the permit or not, but I do care that Kansas follows the laws and regulations governing the process. If following those regulations leads to approving the permit, that is fine. If it results in the department denying the permit, that is fine too. What matters to me is that we follow the law.

I have also instructed him to neither artificially speed up the process nor artificially slow it down. If the department has time to thoroughly review the permit and issue a decision during the time of this administration, that is fine. If despite the department's best efforts, they don't have time... that is also fine.

Now you may wonder how I can say that I don't care if the department approves or denies the permit, just that it follows the law. How can I say that when an important achievement of this administration was the Sunflower settlement?



Mark Parkinson

• Governor of Kansas

The answer is that many people don't understand the Sunflower settlement. The attractive part of the settlement to me was that the proponents of the plant agreed to drop their opposition to progressive energy laws. The settlement was contingent on the Legislature passing a renewable energy standard, provision for net metering and real conservation efforts. The Legislature did so, and those laws will continue to propel Kansas as a renewable energy leader for decades to come.

Without the settlement, we could never have passed the legislation. It is no coincidence that since this legislation passed, we have continued the momentum of developing wind farms, factories to supply turbines to the wind farms and important transmission lines.

Here is what many people do not understand: The settlement did not guarantee that Sunflower would be able to build the proposed plant. It simply guaranteed that Sunflower could apply to build it and the department would not judge its application by any regulations greater than those of the EPA. Kansas would not add to any federal regulations. That is all that I agreed to.

The new energy laws, including a requirement that 20 percent of our electricity comes from renewable sources by 2020, stand whether the department approves the permit or not. The laws stand whether the permit then survives legal challenges, whether the developers get financing for the project and whether the developers get a buyer for the power. In fact, the legislation stands even if the Sunflower expansion never happens.

Now, I know that a number of special interest groups on both sides have exclaimed that there should be no unfair influence on the process. I agree.

One of the two sides will be very upset by the result. But neither will be able to legitimately complain about the fairness of the process. They will complain, but I assure you that any post decision review will establish that the department reviewed this fairly and on the up and up.

The department will make this decision based on law. It will make it during this administration only if it can conduct a thorough review of all the comments. Nothing is preordained and I haven't told anyone to reach any conclusion.

This is the way I have governed for the last 20 months and the way I will continue to govern until Jan. 10.

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Mallard Fillmore

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