

Other Viewpoints

Sunflower setback will hurt Holcomb

A recent setback for Sunflower Electric Power Corp. understandably fueled the ire of local officials.

On Oct. 4, the Kansas Supreme Court reversed the Kansas Department of Health and Environment's decision to issue a permit for expansion of Sunflower's power plant at Holcomb — a project that has drawn strong opposition from environmentalists who question coal-fired power plant emissions.

The ruling sends Sunflower's permit request back to the department to consider more recent, stricter standards before granting a new permit. Sunflower officials vowed to push on toward the \$2.2 billion project that would add an 895-megawatt coal-fired plant.

In response to the court ruling, Holcomb Mayor Gary Newman understandably questioned why a federal government supposedly interested in lessening dependence on foreign oil and developing a more diversified energy portfolio wouldn't support a Sunflower plan with cutting-edge, pollution-gathering technology.

Matt Allen, city manager for Garden City, rightly noted how the Sunflower expansion would help ensure adequate baseload energy and affordability for consumers.

Finney County Economic Development Corp. President Lona DuVall had cause to question opponents' criticism of power being sent out of Kansas — a state eager to export crops, aircraft and more — and on to a significant number of users in Colorado.

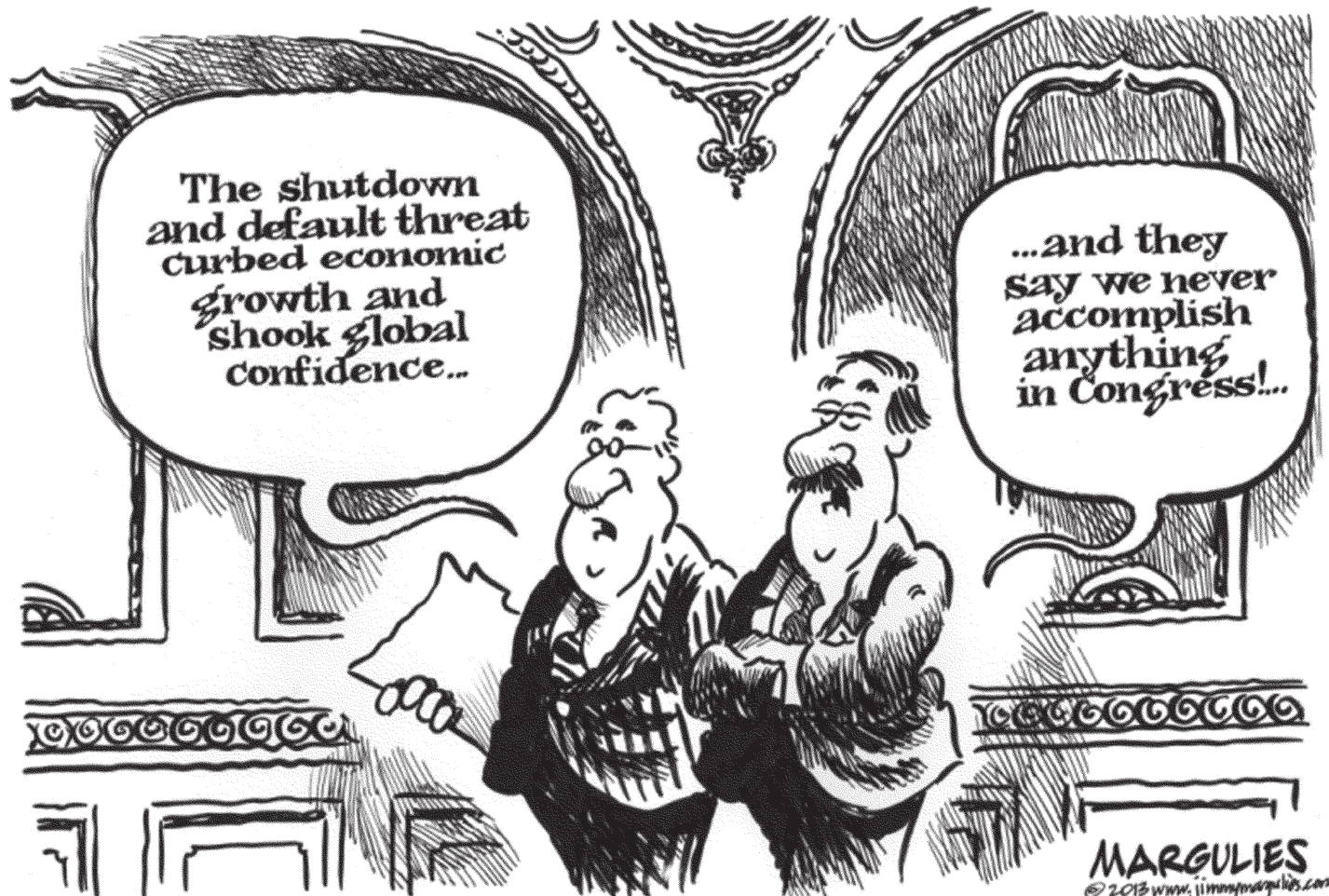
The expansion also would create some 2,000 jobs during peak construction, and about 200 new full- and part-time jobs when operational.

Unlike folks on the front line who understand the need to strike a balance between affordability, reliability of energy sources and environmental responsibility, opponents have fixated only on the environment. They show too little regard for how utilities would address future energy needs in ways that best serve consumers.

While everyone should want to protect the environment, the goal should be producing affordable energy from a variety of sources, coal included, to meet demand while reducing emissions. In addressing environmental concerns, Sunflower voluntarily pursued innovative plans to slash carbon dioxide emissions.

Utilities have an obligation to meet demand in an affordable way while pursuing technology that reduces emissions. The Sunflower project would do as much, something opponents still fail to acknowledge in their stubborn quest to block the expansion plan.

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



Fix obstructions to world trade

U.S. agriculture depends on world trade for its continued viability. More than \$141 billion in agricultural goods were exported last year.

Still U.S. port facilities and waterway infrastructures are decades behind international competitors due to lack of funding.

"Three things continue to obstruct U.S. agricultural exports that could be delivered to all regions of the world, especially the rapidly growing Asian markets," says Steve Baccus, an Ottawa County grain farmer who serves as Kansas Farm Bureau president. "This includes too many rules, regulations and a lack of investment in export facilities by Washington; the lack of cooperation between countries pertaining to international trade and regulations and trade requirements imposed by individual countries on one another."

During the last two years Baccus has served as chair of the American Farm Bureau Federation's trade advisory committee. Throughout this time, this committee has traveled to countries, port facilities and waterways around the world to identify the many impediments to U.S. exports. During these travels they've also visited with food producers and seen crops first hand.

Illustrating his point about the need to upgrade and improve U.S. port infrastructures, Baccus used the example of Singapore, the largest port in the world. This facility was built by its government and one private businessman.

"In Singapore the cranes load and unload ships with one individual sitting in a computer booth two miles away," Baccus said. "No union labor, no union guy crawling up and operating each (individual) crane each shift, each day."

Yet, in this port facility half way around the world, a loaded ship leaves the port of Singa-



John Schlageck

• Insights
Kansas Farm Bureau

pore every 12 minutes, Baccus said. A loaded ship leaves a U.S. port every one and one-half hours.

The same businessman who helped build the Singapore port is looking at building a similar port in Tijuana, Mexico.

If this investor has the resources to build the port in Singapore, he probably has the resources to build in Tijuana, Baccus said. If he has the resources to build these ports, he has the resources to build the infrastructure to move the goods from Tijuana to the U.S. border.

"What happens to West Coast ports if he builds a port like Singapore in Tijuana?" Baccus asks. "He'll cause major problems all along the West Coast."

And if this potential nightmare with Mexico isn't enough, Baccus witnessed another real challenge facing the United States and its agricultural exports.

During a recent trip to the Pacific Northwest, the Ottawa County grain farmer visited with several California fruit and vegetables growers. These food producers don't have enough labor to harvest their valuable crops.

"We talked to a producer who grows string beans and garlic," Baccus said. "He didn't have enough labor to harvest both fields so he had to choose between the crops. This grower decided to mow down his string beans so he would have the labor to harvest his garlic. These beans cost him between \$2,000 and

\$3,000 an acre to plant."

Another California grower was forced to leave 20 acres of vegetables in the field to rot, Baccus said. This crop could have yielded him nearly \$8 million.

In California and other parts of this country, agricultural producers are shifting to different crops that can be harvested by machines because they cannot find available labor.

"Farmers can't find the labor from south of our border to pick crops that must be harvested by hand," Baccus said. "Americans won't do this work. Farmers in California have tried. They work for an hour or two and quit."

There are legal immigrants who are accustomed to working for \$2.50 a day in Mexico who want to come to the U.S., he said. They'll work for \$10 or \$15 an hour and send their money to Mexico to support their families.

They're not interested in staying here, Baccus said. Most don't want to be U.S. citizens. They're willing to pay taxes. They want to be legal immigrants. They're willing to do whatever it takes to work here.

"It's a real shame we cannot design an immigration program to fix this situation," Baccus said. "If we don't get this job done and our U.S. Congress fails, we're going to see all the fruit and vegetables grown south of the border."

If that happens what could happen to food safety and the safeguards ensured by our highly regulated food industry?

How much control will this country have with the food produced in Mexico?

Zero?

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.

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Sharon Friedlander - Publisher
sfriedlander@nwkansas.com

NEWS

R.B. Headley - Sports Editor
colby.sports@nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansas.com

Sam Dieter - News Reporter
colby.editor@nwkansas.com

Heather Alwin - Society Editor
colby.society@nwkansas.com

ADVERTISING

colby.ads@nwkansas.com

Kathryn Ballard - Advertising Representative
kballard@nwkansas.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design
khunter@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Office Manager

Melissa Edmondson - Office Manager
medmondson@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager
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Syria's weapons not different from ours

In his speech to Congress to put on hold a vote to authorize the use of force in Syria, President Barack Obama acknowledged that "America is not the world's policeman. It is beyond our means to right every wrong."

Then he added: "But when with modest effort and risk we can stop children from being gassed to death ... I think we should act."

On these points, I fully agreed with the president. But, to my consternation, Obama took it a step further.

"That's what makes us exceptional," Obama said. "With humility, but with resolve, we never lose sight of that essential truth."

Apparently, the president felt he needed to offer a sop to the proponents of American exceptionalism. While I love this country, I've always been unnerved by the intentional amnesia at the core of the idea of exceptionalism.

While today people are rightfully outraged by the Syria government's barbaric chemical attacks against its own people, let's not forget our own sordid history with chemical weapons. The Pentagon has admitted the U.S. military used white phosphorous while battling insurgents in Fallujah, Iraq in 2004. According to the *Guardian*, a Pentagon spokesman told the BBC that white phosphorous "was used as an incendiary weapon against enemy combatants." He claimed "it is not a chemical weapon. They are not outlawed or illegal."

Guardian columnist George Monbiot reports that the Pentagon has argued that white



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

phosphorous burns people rather than poisoning them, and is covered by protocol on incendiary weapons, which the U.S. hasn't signed.

But as Peter Kaiser of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons told the BBC: "If ... the toxic properties of white phosphorous, the caustic properties, are specifically intended to be used as a weapon, that of course is prohibited, because ... any chemicals used against humans or animals that cause harm or death through the toxic properties of the chemical are considered chemical weapons."

There also is the uncomfortable fact, revealed by CIA files; that U.S. intelligence officials helped Saddam Hussein locate Iranian troops even when they knew Hussein's government would attack with chemical weapons, including sarin, a lethal nerve agent. The Iraqi attacks were in 1988, but former intelligence officials like Air Force Col. Rick Francona told *Foreign Policy* magazine the U.S. had evidence of Iraqi chemical attacks by 1983.

Nick Harris of *Foreign Policy* wrote that declassified CIA documents reveal "that senior

U.S. officials were being regularly informed about the scale of the nerve gas attacks."

"They are tantamount to an official American admission of complicity in some of the most gruesome chemical weapons attacks ever launched," Harris wrote.

If we delve even further back, it's hard to ignore the U.S. use of Agent Orange in southern Vietnam and along the border of Laos and Cambodia. The Air Force poured more than 20 million gallons of Agent Orange — contaminated with dioxin, which can cause cancer and birth defects — in the three countries. The Vietnamese Red Cross, citing local studies, estimates that over 150,000 children are handicapped because of the Agent Orange and as many as one million Vietnamese have disabilities or other health problems.

Personally, I'm in favor of a greater U.S. role in Syria that involves missile strikes in areas away from civilian populations and a willingness to arm the moderate elements of the Syrian resistance. But, America's inability or unwillingness to confront its own ugly past with chemical weapons makes our concern over Syria look like selective outrage.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate and former Colby Free Press sports editor now living in Ottumwa, Iowa, loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing. You can find his blog at www.orble.com/just-one-mans-vision, or find him at twitter.com/heintz23.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

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