

from our viewpoint...

# State should protect our electric grid

As Kansas legislators move bravely into the new world of consumer-generated energy, we hope they take care to protect the future of our electric grid.

An energy package passed by the House and Senate and just vetoed by Gov. Kathleen Sebelius included provisions for "net metering" homes with "cogeneration" equipment.

At first, this will include solar generation, but it can be expanded to cover wind generators and other sources a homeowner might install. There's no doubt these will become more important as time goes by, and energy becomes more and more expensive.

That's a good thing, but the state has to be careful not to force utilities to pay too much for this homeowner-generated power. Current Kansas law allows consumers to buy power at retail rates and sell power back to a utility at the wholesale rate paid for other power. This can be quite a difference in the utility's favor, and people don't like it.

The state is stuck between taxpayers who want a "fair" deal for power and utilities that have to buy at wholesale and sell at retail to make a profit. The law needs to be fair to both. Even customer-owned cooperatives have to make a margin to stay in business.

To be able to supply power at all, a utility has to build generation plants, transmission lines, switching and control facilities, offices and yards, and hire people to run them. It depends on the spread between wholesale power costs and retail charges to pay the bills.

Consumers, even those with a wind generator or solar power grid, depend on the utility's lines to get them through dark nights and still, quiet evenings when they can't generate power — and to take away their excess when they can. They need the service, even if they don't buy much juice.

It's only fair they pay their share for the power grid, no matter how much of their own power they generate. Some utilities have created a monthly minimum "wires and facilities" charge to cover their costs, billing for power at a lower retail rate. That might help.

But the state has to be careful not to force utilities to buy power back at full retail rate. They need a spread between buy and sell rates. The state wants to encourage people to make their own power from renewable sources like sun and wind, especially solar power.

Solar power really is free, except for the cost of capturing it as electricity. It has less environmental impact, since most solar energy will be absorbed by the earth one way or another. Unlike burning fossil fuels such as coal or oil, which releases energy stored millions of years ago, solar does not much change the net load on the planet. It just shifts it around some.

The Legislature will have to balance the needs of homeowners and utilities in a way that encourages people to make electricity at home and ensures the power grid will be maintained for everyone.

In Colorado this year, the governor claims, utilities and users got together and agreed on a "net metering" bill. That kind of cooperation Kansas needs, not the sort of fight we are in today.

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius seems determined to push her national agenda by blocking construction of two coal-fired power plants near Garden City. While older plants serving eastern Kansas are much dirtier, the western Kansas plants have become a symbol for both sides.

There seems to be no room for compromise, at least on the governor's part. Her efforts so far have been laughable, unworkable and unhelpful.

Down the road, though, the net metering issue needs to be resolved to the benefit of all concerned. — Steve Haynes



# Tell me why we can't have a civil society

How many discussions have you had about J.Lo's twins? What about the latest blockbuster film? Now, how many recent conversations have you had about public policy? The proper role of government? Philosophy? Economics?

Kudos if you can recall the last conversation you had about the later items. But for most of us we are more likely to know the latest celebrity gossip than what's going on in the rest of the world.

I can't say that back "when I was a kid" we talked about the more important stuff either because my generation is especially guilty of failing to discuss the more "important things." And it's unfortunate.

What have we lost when we would rather sit with friends and watch hours of reality T.V. instead of discussing the latest book we read or what we heard about on the news that day? We might shrug it off and say it's not that important, but it is that important.

We've lost civil discourse. The problem is that it doesn't just hurt us individually; it hurts us as a society. Civil discourse and debate are integral to preserving representative democracy and to progress. In discussions we are challenged to think critically of our views, to consider alternatives, and to come up with solutions.

So why are we losing this aspect of our culture? There are probably several reasons and it is important to identify them so that they can be overcome or at least considered.

One reason might be fear. It is much harder to be an expert on international politics than to



## from other pens

• commentary

follow what's going on in the life of the stars. Because of this, many people start out not knowing much about the important things to discuss and they let that hold them back. That's a mistake. It's better to ask questions and jump into the debate than to ignore the discussion all together. The truth is most of us aren't experts and none of us are experts on everything. That doesn't mean that our opinions are unimportant and it doesn't warrant neglecting the subjects altogether. We must overcome this fear and jump in somewhere.

Secondly, perhaps we are wary of arguing. We don't want to cause discord at the dinner party or at the cocktail hour. But, why not? The trick is not to take things personally. We must reclaim the enjoyment of a little intelligent good-faith jesting.

Yet another barrier could be the fast-paced environment in which we live. On one hand this means there is an abundant amount of information at our fingertips. On the other, it means that information is constantly changing. But that's one reason that discussion is important. Maybe one person missed the latest news on a subject that someone else can catch him or her up on.

Furthermore, too often we seem too busy to stop and talk. It may take longer to discuss a

local political issue than it does to mention the latest film we saw. Few of us sit at the kitchen table and discuss things with our families, even less often do we invite friends over for discussion.

Whatever the reasons might be for losing the culture of discussing ideas, it must be remedied. The cost is too high.

First, it costs us socially. Discussions allow us to connect with other people and to think through ideas. What are we robbing our children of when we don't set an example of open discourse of ideas? Debating with each other helps develop critical thinking skills and the ability to articulate ideas and messages. This, in turn, enables people to come up with solutions and innovations. By sharing ideas and knowledge we help society to progress.

Second, it costs us politically. Representative democracy depends on active citizens who monitor the issues and hold politicians accountable. But if people stop paying attention to public policy issues and instead defer to others, that accountability is lost.

We all must challenge ourselves to go beyond discussions on pop culture and to delve into the more complex, but very important, issues of the day. If we fail to do so it will be a loss for each of us and for society as a whole.

Sarah McIntosh is Vice President of Programs for the Kansas-based Flint Hills Center for Public Policy. She can be reached at sarah.mcintosh@flinthills.org. To learn more about the Flint Hills Center, please visit www.flinthills.org.

# Suggestions for McCain's vice president



## will durst

• raging moderate

WARREN BUFFETT. World's richest man can't hurt, in case the campaign needs a loan. Or the country.

JAMES EARL JONES. The most trusted voice in show business.

DAN QUAYLE. Knows the drill.

ED MCMAHON. Knows the drill AND he knows the intro: "Here's Joohhhnyyyyyy."

RONALD REAGAN. Quit pussyfooting around. It's what the base wants. Who cares if he's dead? How much less animated is that from second term?

JEB BUSH. Ups the Bush streak to seven of last eight GOP tickets.

JOELIEBERMAN. Invests campaign with bipartisan spin. Also returns "Joementum" to national lexicon.

KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON. Takes "woman" thing out of play

CINDY MCCAIN. Takes "woman" thing out of play, and keeps it in the family.

COLIN POWELL. Takes "black" thing out of play.

CONDOLEZZA RICE. Takes "woman and black" things out of play.

GEORGE CLOONEY. Takes "woman" thing out of play.

JOAN RIVERS. Takes "old" thing out of play. "Woman" thing still in play.

LARRY KING. Takes "old" and "woman" things out of play.

ANDY ROONEY. Really takes "old" thing out of play. No, really.

ALAN GREENSPAN. Wasn't everything a whole lot better when he was in charge? And takes "old" thing out of play.

MARY CHENEY. Takes "lesbian" and "unwed mother" things out of play.

DICK CHENEY. What the hell. Something to be said for continuity.

FRED THOMPSON. Throws a bone to the conservative wing and makes candidate appear vibrant.

REGIS PHILBIN. A touch of Hollywood.

lack of wigs.

BRETT FAVRE. Terrific name recognition. Needs a job. Sews up Wisconsin and Mississippi.

JOHN MADDEN. Who doesn't love John Madden? Brings total telestrator dominance to ticket.

KIEFER SUTHERLAND. What right-winger doesn't love Jack Bauer? Torture question becomes moot.

TED WILLIAMS' HEAD. Future-focused. Travel costs slashed. Low maintenance.

RUSHLIMBAUGH. If you can't beat them, conjoin them.

WILLIE NELSON. You have any idea of what percentage of this country smokes pot?

SNOOPDOG. Puts the shazizzle back in the campaignizzle.

STEPHEN HAWKING. Not American-born. But who would quibble with smartest man in the world?

DONALD TRUMP. Makes everyone look humanoid in comparison.

SUNNY VON BULOW. Like Terry Schiavo, only alive. And rich.

KARL ROVE. Assassination insurance.

DONALD RUMSFELD. See Karl Rove.

NEWT GINGRICH. See Karl Rove

JACK KEVORKIAN. Looking to enter politics and makes top of the ticket lovable and youthful and animated. Also, see Karl Rove.

G. GORDON LIDDY. Because there comes a time when every president needs a human firewall.

Comic, author, former oyster shucker and radio talk show host Will Durst is betting on some anonymous Midwestern Governor with little if any track record.

Will Durst is a political comedian who has performed around the world and is a pundit on television and radio. E-mail Will at durst@caglecartoons.com.

MITT ROMNEY. Just to exploit the incredible chemistry between the two.

CHER. Campaign will never suffer from

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e-mail: star-news@nwkansan.com

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nwkansas.com

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services

(ntbetz@nwkansas.com)

Evan Barnum, Systems Admin.(support@nwkansas.com)

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