

from our viewpoint...

First step taken for brighter days

It isn't exactly time for singing "Happy Days are Here Again," but the groundbreaking Tuesday at the Goodland Energy Center truly was a reason to celebrate.

The center will begin to rise on the hill north of Caruso, with the power plant under way now and the ethanol plant and biodiesel plants to begin construction later this summer.

Mark Justus, president of ReNewable Energy Resources, said this is a unique project, the type of cooperative energy development that is an example of the leading-edge efforts needed to increase the availability of good, clean reasonably priced electricity and transportation fuels.

The center has the attention of a lot of people in Topeka and elsewhere, and the attention of people who are interested in the biodiesel plant development in particular.

Sometimes economic development comes from a chance meeting, a special conversation and the vision to make things happen.

Ron Pickman, chief operating officer of Goodland Energy Resources, said the center sprang from such a conversation over a year ago.

Norman House, one of the investors in the power plant, said he had heard the first step is the hardest, and hoped that was true. House was a major part of that conversation a year ago, and he was part of the vision to bring the pieces together to make things happen.

The coal-fired power plant will be a great boost to the economy of Sherman County, and provide a good power source for the continued development of the area.

This project is bringing out the best in the people of northwest Kansas, the kind of innovative spirit the pioneers would be proud of.

The one area that is lagging behind is the wind farm, which was supposed to be up and running over seven months ago.

Justus said he had trouble getting the generators he wanted, but they were finally shipped in February.

Tuesday, he said they were scheduled to be unloaded in Houston the first week of May, but Chuck Lutters, vice president of ReNewable, said he had not heard for sure they were off the ship.

Compared to the \$40 million of the energy center, the four or five wind towers don't seem that big a deal, but they will be an important part of the overall energy plan for the city.

Getting the wind farm up and running is vital to give the city the best options to provide power for expansion and improvement.

Progress is great to have, and we hope all the plans work out. There are bound to be some more bumps in the process, but we hope the next step — an air quality permit for the proposed ethanol plant — is even easier than the first. — *Tom Betz*

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A Republican Jimmy Carter

George W. Bush is a one-term president now serving deep into his second term.

Like his father, he shot his bolt during his first four years. Unlike his dad, he was able to persuade America to keep him around for another term. But he seems destined to spend the remainder of his tenure, à la Nixon, "twisting slowly in the wind."

Bush has truly become the Republican equivalent of President Jimmy Carter, out of control, dropping in popularity, unable to resume command. He barely skated through 2004 using the issue of terrorism. But his very success in preventing further attacks has eroded the strength of the issue and has undermined its political importance. Tax cuts, the cause celebre of his 2000 campaign, have long since been passed and yielded their economic growth. But they're long gone as a key issue.

Yet Bush, like his father, fails to invent issues to give his presidency a new lease on life. Is he too tired or lazy to do so? Does he not believe in government doing very much in the first place? Or is he so preoccupied with Iraq — as Carter was with the hostage crisis — that he can't divert his attention to new issues?

Even when he seeks to develop an issue, his approach is half-hearted and ineffective. It seems that on any issue other than taxes and terrorism, he has attention-deficit disorder. He



dick morris

• commentary

squandered his re-election "political capital" on a Social Security reform plan that he spent six months pushing and a year and a half running away from.

His energetic denunciation of America's "oil addiction" animated his State of the Union speech, but by March, it was missing from his rhetoric. It never even got to the stage of a program before he abandoned it. Now he flirts with the immigration issue — seeking a middle course that satisfies nobody.

And so, with no political immune system, he is subject to the infection du jour, be it the Dubai ports deal or the Iraq leaking scandal. In the meantime, his party is wallowing in a massive public perception of congressional corruption.

What can Bush do? Anything he wants to. He's still president. Here's a menu:

Really focus on energy issues. Come out for massive investment in ethanol production, delivery and vehicles, and more; retrofitting all gas stations for ethanol and hydrogen; a new

push for nuclear power; heavy investment in clean coal technology, burying the carbon dioxide. Truly lead the nation away from petroleum.

Admit that global warming is happening, and launch major new programs to curb it: Many are the same measures as can solve our energy dependence. But add in mandatory up-grading of power plants to cut emissions and major investment in solar and bio-mass energy.

Build a wall, but let guest workers in: Right-wingers want a wall on our southern border; they'd accept a guest-worker program if we could regulate our own borders. Latinos would accept a wall if there were a chance for immigrants to do legal work and a path to citizenship. Give both what they want, and lead the country into a grand compromise.

Put the drug fight front and center: Demand drug testing in schools with parental consent, and tax incentives for workplace drug testing. Link cocaine to terrorism, and build a national consensus for tough measures to cut demand.

Bush can restore his presidency's drive with new issues. If he doesn't, he'll wind up leading his party to the greatest shipwreck since Watergate.

Dick Morris was an adviser to former President Bill Clinton for 20 years. E-mail him at dmredding@aol.com.

Some days it is better to stay in bed

Some days, you just shouldn't get out of bed, I think.

In fact, that sounds like a pretty good idea for today.

It's wet and cold and nasty out there. But it's paper day, and I have to go to work. If I don't, the rest of the staff knows where I live. They'd come get me.

I think Fabiola wished she hadn't gotten out of bed on Thursday.

If she'd have called in sick, she'd never have met Cynthia and I. And her life would have been much better for the experience.

Not that we were mean to her, mind you.

Just that she had a whole lot of trouble getting us into a hotel room.

We drove to Wichita for the Kansas Press convention. It was at the Marriott, which is billed as being on East Kellogg, the main drag, though it isn't.

The hotel actually is on a sort of private drive that wanders in from a side street. Wherever you are on Kellogg, you can see it, but you can't get to it from there, no matter where there is.

The hotel property backs up to the east Turnpike entrance, but the access road runs about a quarter mile east on private land. That came in handy the last time the convention was there, because Fred Phelps came to picket. He has to stay on public property, which was so far away that nobody noticed him.

Anyway, we left late and drove all afternoon, skidding in just in time to check in and go on the tour. Fabiola gave us a room on the second floor and we zipped on up.

When we got there, the key worked but the room obviously was occupied. I was parking the car and met Cynthia on her way back to the



steve haynes

• along the sappa

desk.

Fabiola made us new keys for a room on the third floor.

As we opened the door, we knew something was wrong.

The beds weren't made, the bathroom was a mess and there were personal effects on the desk.

The room was, in a word, occupied.

Cynthia's jaw dropped. After she came to her senses, she exclaimed her disappointment: "Two occupied rooms," she said, "and I don't get to see one naked man."

I assured her it would have been a middle-aged businessman with a pot belly, and she'd seen that already.

She went back to the desk. The look on

Fabiola's face was priceless.

She gave us another room, on the fifth floor this time.

I was starting to worry, because the hotel only had eight floors, and time was slipping away.

When we got to the third room, though, it was clean and unoccupied. We unpacked the luggage cart and Cynthia started to draw a bath.

"Oh," she exclaimed. "The water isn't hot and it'll take all night to fill at this rate."

She was right. The shower would barely run a drip.

I started for the front desk. I didn't think Fabiola wanted to see Cynthia again.

Halfway down the hall, Cynthia called to me. "I got it to run," she said.

I was glad.

As I got back to the room, the phone rang. It was Fabiola.

"Is your room all right?" she asked in a worried voice.

"Fine," I reassured her.

She had no idea.

where to write

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