

State needs to make power transfer fair to all

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 that 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 also 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 that the power grid will be maintained for everyone.

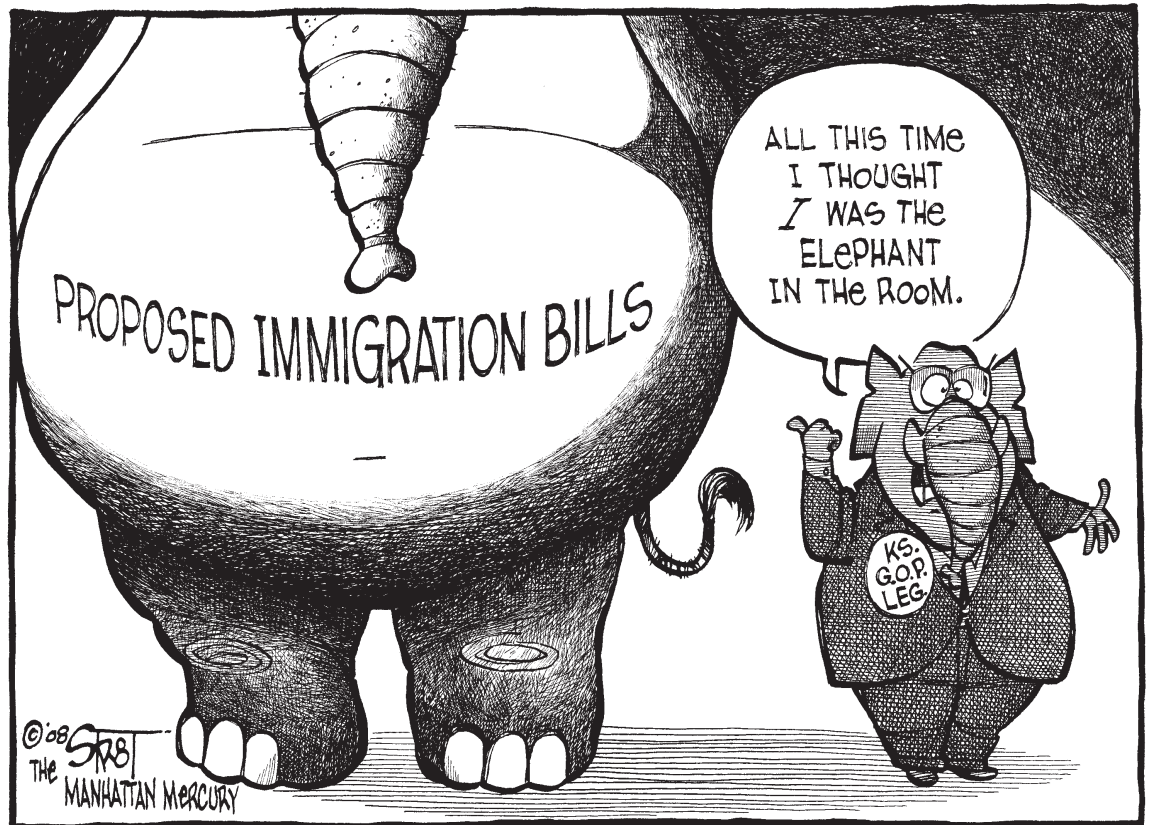
In Colorado this year, the governor claims, that utilities and users got together and agreed on a "net metering" bill. That kind of cooperation Kansas needs, not the sort of fight we are in today.

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



Raising cash? Please report

At *The Herald*, we're often asked to run items — and donate ads — for fund-raising events. And we're glad to help.

Occasionally, though, the sponsor of an event is less than forthcoming about the finances involved, and this causes some problems.

We think anyone who asks the public for money should be completely open — transparent, as they say in government today — about what they're doing. When you go public with an appeal, after all, it's no longer a private matter.

This applies both to groups raising money for a specific cause and quasi-public agencies like the Decatur County Amusement Authority, the Chamber of Commerce or the county museum board.

The basic principle applies to all: if you ask the public for money, you need to account for it. It shouldn't be a big deal, and usually it isn't.

But there have been enough questions that we'd like to set out a policy, and it is this:

If you want us to run a story about any appeal for money, we need enough information about how it will be spent to give people confidence in giving. The release ought to say exactly what the money will go for.

If it will be for a civic group's projects or a specific project, say so. If you're raising money for an individual or family, give a clear statement of the need, not just a name. Why does this person or family need money?

Groups such as the Amusement Authority or Chamber (and we cite these as examples, not as problems)



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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are mostly private in nature, but they ask the public to support them. The Chamber has as its membership most of the businesses in the county and many individuals. An agency like that — or the Amusement Authority, which is a Chamber unit and performs a public role at the county fair — owes it to the "stockholders" in town to be forthcoming.

The need for openness is stronger with groups such as the Fair Board and Museum Board, formed by and supported partly with county tax money. They fall under the state Open Records Act and by law must make their finances public.

We are not criticizing past performance by any group. Most are more than willing to let the public know what they are up to. But we want everyone to know the questions we'll be asking and the information we expect to publish in the paper.

Life is easier when we have all the cards on the table. We want fund raisers, especially those doing a one-time or infrequent appeals, to know what will be expected. After the event, we'll want to know how much was raised and where it went.

The Herald always supports community causes. We will run a story in advance of any event, and we try

to get a report on how each one did. For groups such as the Amusement Authority, which has a mostly new board this year whose members may be unfamiliar with the situation, we report each year on the group's finances and the performance of the home-owned carnival. Since the carnival probably needs a new ride or two and could stand to do some fund raising, this is a good time to mention our expectations.

Members of public boards, such as the fair and museum boards, need to know what they are getting into as well.

The bottom line is, when you are spending someone else's money, you need to be prepared to account for it. It's not a big deal, just part of being in public life.

Anyone with questions is more than welcome to ask how this applies to their situation. When you call with a release on a fund raiser, we'll try to explain.

And we're liable to have some questions of our own. Take no offense. We're just getting a report for the community you serve.

Any group collecting and spending people's money should be glad to make one.

Soldier recalls air invasion

To the Editor:
Lest we forget Operation Varsity,
24 March 1945:

The 17th Airborne Division and the British 6th Airborne Division took off from airfields in France to make the Rhine River crossing in "Operation Varsity."

Some 906 Waco CG-4A gliders (with some 578 in double tow) loaded with men, jeeps, artillery and other equipment, towed by C-47s and the vulnerable C-46s, made the historic crossing. A combined force of 17,000 men was dropped in just over two hours in an area containing 85,000 German Troops.

The worst single day in history for airborne casualties was recorded by the 1,070 members of the 17th and the British 6th killed and the thousands wounded on that day.

How well I remember that day just 63 years ago. We experienced many training flights and parachute jumps in preparation for the big day, which turned out to be March 24. I was assigned as the executive officer, Co A, 194th Glider Infantry. First Sgt Robert Kepler and I, along with 10 men and a glider pilot, made the crossing in a CG-4A.

Letter to the Editor

There were two gliders behind each C-47 and we were in the "short tow." We were fortunate, with no trouble in landing. Many comrades were not so lucky and paid the supreme price.

Please join me in a very special prayer for those who made the supreme sacrifice, for our distinguished veterans and valued comrades who have passed on since that fateful day, and for those of us

who are nearing the end of the line. Goodnight and God bless you.

A proud and grateful American.
Col. Delbert L. Townsend
U.S. Army retired
Fort Washington, Md.

Editor's Note: Col. Townsend is President of the 7th Airborne Division Association.

From the Bible

But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping; and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre,

And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain....she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was him.

Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?...

Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.

The Gospel According to St. John, 20:11-16.

THE OBERLIN HERALD

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Published each Wednesday by Haynes Publishing Co., 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749. Periodicals mail postage paid at Oberlin, Kan. 67749.

Steve and Cynthia Haynes, publishers
Official newspaper of Oberlin, Jennings, Norcatur, Dresden and Decatur County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, Colorado Press Association, Nebraska Press Association and Inland Press Association.

Subscriptions: One year, \$33 (tax included) in Decatur, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Thomas and Red Willow counties; \$38 (tax included) elsewhere in Kansas; \$42 elsewhere in the U.S. Foreign subscriptions, \$50-\$250 (in US dollars only) extra per year (except APO/FPO). POSTMASTER: Send change of address to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243.

Office hours: 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Mon.-Fri.
(Also open most Saturdays when someone is in.)

Building a home, save a life



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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It's true we change the lives of Mexican families in Juarez when we build them a house — but never had we run into a life-or-death situation.

This trip, however, a member of our team saved a woman's life.

It was the second day of building and all 25 team members were busy with work assignments. Irma, the woman we were building for, had returned from the market with bags of groceries.

She was hot and tired and went to her water barrel to splash some water on her face to refresh herself.

As she leaned over the 55-gallon barrel, some coins from her shirt pocket fell into the water. Irma is about 5 feet tall, and as she leaned into the barrel to retrieve the coins, she lost her balance and fell in head-first.

No one saw this happen and Irma was submerged in the water for almost a minute before Rebekah, a girl on the team, saw Irma's legs sticking out of the barrel. She grabbed Irma and with the help of others, managed to pull her out of the water.

Everyone was shaken, but thankful the day did not end in tragedy. Irma was almost hysterical after the rescue and later we learned that she had lost a child to drowning several years before and she had relived that horror when she thought she herself might die.

We all cried with her as she showed us pictures of her baby who was "con Dios" (with God).

Irma recovered and spent the afternoon baking cookies for the team. I recognized them as Mexican wedding cookies. With ground pecans added, some call them Russian teacakes. They are nothing but butter and flour kneaded into a dough, shaped into little crescent shapes, baked and rolled in powdered sugar while still hot. The kids loved them — they just melted in your mouth.

The other thing I learned from Irma was how to make chilis rellenos, a skill I have been trying to conquer for two years. I watched her "burn" the Poblano chilis on an open fire, then steam them in a plastic bag. While the chilis cooled, she grated an onion and mixed it with ranchero cheese. She separated eggs and whipped (with a fork) the egg whites until they were stiff, then folded in the beaten yolks.

After slipping the skins from the chilis, she slit them open, removed the seeds (that's where the heat is) and stuffed them with the onion-cheese mixture. Next, she dipped the chilis into the egg mixture and then into very hot oil. As they fried, they puffed up. She fried them on

both sides and then removed them to a plate to cool.

Wrapped in a warm tortilla with just a touch of green chili sauce, they were "delicioso." Simple food, but so good.

After working with Irma in her kitchen, I determined she needed a few things to make her life a little easier. First on the list was a whisk to make beating egg whites a little easier. Next were hot pads — she did not have any and had burned her fingers several times trying to remove pans from the oven using rags. I picked up a plastic cutting board and a new knife. I also added a dish towel and a butane lighter. You would have thought I had given her the moon, she was so happy with her gifts.

When we last saw Irma, her husband Victor and their three children, Manuel, Ana Christian and little Luis, they were sweeping the floor on their new three-room house, a happy family.

Lord, grant me the contentment Irma has with her simple life. And the gratefulness to appreciate the abundance I have. Amen.

Honor Roll

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