

## Energy debate more about beliefs than facts

Energy has become the watchword of our political discussion, though there's little real understanding of what counts — and what doesn't — in the energy debate.

Since most of us — political operatives included — know little about the economics and impacts of energy decisions, we tend to believe what we want to believe.

So the debate becomes a matter of faith, every bit as much as those over abortion or a balanced budget.

Today, the argument is over whether to renew our push for oil in offshore fields and in the Alaskan wilderness. No one has any figures on whether there's enough oil to make any impact on American consumption, but everyone has an opinion.

It's the same with proposals to build coal-fired power plants: Proponents argue that we need the power, that these plants would be cleaner than any yet built in the state. Opponents, most of whom only assume global warming is a threat, fear the added "carbon footprint."

How many on either side understand the carbon-dioxide equation?

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, hot to get to Washington one way or another, has staked much of her political capital on opposing coal plants and pushing wind power.

No one thinks wind power is bad, except those who don't want some of our most scenic landscape cluttered up with giant windmills, but is it really the answer to our needs?

Unless someone can figure out how to store massive amounts of electricity, it can't be, but the emotional arguments in favor of wind are unstoppable.

Are Big Oil companies ripping off the American public to pile up unconscionable profits?

The answer depends more on whether you see Big Oil as greedy corporations out to rape

the land or as a few million retirees whose union (or state) pension plans happen to own a lot of oil stock, doesn't it?

True, corporate executives bring down huge salaries, especially when times are good, but stockholders seem to benefit the most. And who are they? Just average Americans with a pension or 401K plan. That's all.

Oddly enough, the same unions whose pensions benefit from high oil prices often back Democrats who decry the greed of Big Oil. Members don't make the connection, apparently, between oil profits and healthy pensions.

Then there are those who told us oil prices were never coming down. Demand will drive them ever higher, these doomsayers cried.

The plunge in the last week gave that the lie. Now "experts" say oil might drop back to \$70 a barrel, with fuel prices following.

Is it all a plot to make us appreciate \$3-a-gallon gas?

Could be. If you believe in conspiracy theory.

It all comes back to belief. Belief that times are bad tends to make them so. Belief that what's happening at this instant will go on forever blinds us to the change around the bend.

Sometimes, especially in politics, when there's hay to be made, the underlying facts don't have much to do with it. Belief is enough.

And some days, belief is all we have. Few of us are equipped to investigate and understand economics or global markets. The one truth is that markets, left to their own devices, will solve their own problems. Politicians seldom solve anything.

But if you believe that, it's hard to believe most of the rest, isn't it?

— Steve Haynes

## Soot included in dining fare

"Soot, It's What's for Dinner." Sounds tasty, doesn't it?

This book, which I bought in Chama, N.M., is a compilation of recipes by members of the Friends of the Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railroad, and the title is apt.

While on vacation in Colorado last week, we took a ride on the Cumbres, an old narrow-gauge railroad that winds back and forth across the Colorado-New Mexico border for 64 miles. The train is pulled by a coal-burning engine, which throws sparks and cinders into the air with the abandon of a Mardi Gras carnival-goer tossing candy and beads.

Environmental officials have suggested making the railroad change its historic engines over to burn oil, but so far the line, owned jointly by the two states, has resisted the change.

You have a choice. You can board the train in Antonito, Colo., and ride to Osier, Colo., which is a mountain meadow in the middle of nowhere reachable only by train or a gravel track. Or, you can board in Chama and ride to Osier.

At Osier, there is a large dining hall and a small gift shop. Passengers have their choice of tak-



### Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes  
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ing picnic lunches or eating in the cafeteria-style lunchroom. When I say cafeteria-style, I mean as in high school cafeteria, not the multi-choice places at colleges. The food is decent and plentiful, but not cuisine. They cook it. You eat it.

Our train consisted of an engine, coal tender, three coaches, snack/bathroom car, parlor car and an open gondola. The parlor car costs twice as much as seats in the coaches, which have neither electricity nor water. Steve selected the second passenger car and got us seats near the front.

The cars are coupled together so that you can walk between them via little platforms. The doors at each end are kept open to facilitate movement.

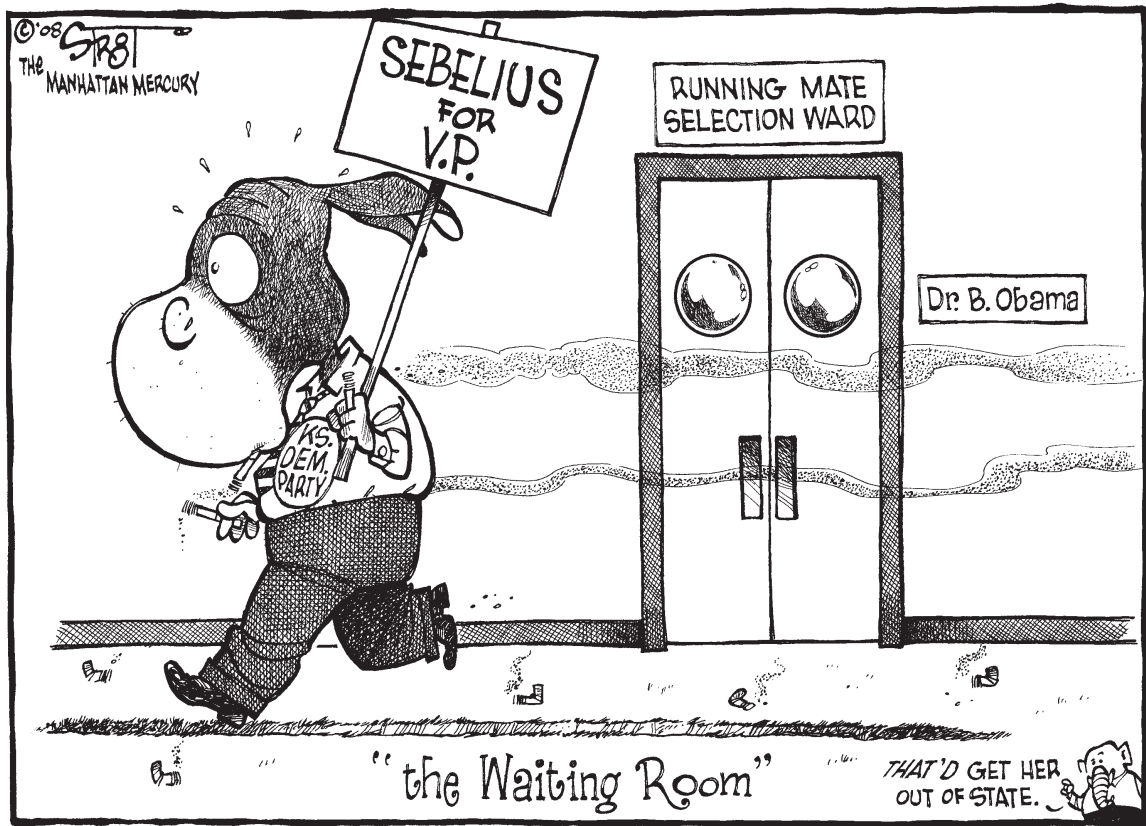
As we huffed and puffed up the mountainside, I could see what looked like a fine rain falling through

the space between the cars. It was a sunny day, not a cloud in the sky. I soon realized, looking at the floor, that what I was seeing was soot and cinders. My white jeans were soon smudged, and when I took off my sunglasses, you could see where they had been.

While Steve roamed the cars and talked to the crew, I read my cookbook, contemplated the free ingredients, which were spewing from the engine ahead of me and thought:

"I'm glad Gov. Kathleen Sebelius isn't on this trip. She'd try to get the whole railroad closed down."

Fortunately, she's governor of Kansas, and Bill Richardson is governor of New Mexico. He's a former secretary of energy, and a liberal Democrat, but they say he loves trains.



## Her tale is a little bit cheesy

I had a Tom Hanks moment this week. Remember the movie, "Castaway"? And the exaltation he felt when he made a fire? He danced around crowing, "I made fire! I made fire!"

That's the way I felt when I made cheese. Not just any cheese. It was mozzarella.

I had prepared for the moment. Bought the organic milk (at \$12 a gallon), liquid rennet, citric acid and cheese salt. Following the step-by-step instructions and using a candy thermometer, I mixed, stirred, watched the temp and (hardest of all) waited.

Slowly, the whey started to appear; then the curds. Finally, when the temperature was right, I spooned the curds into a colander to drain. After squeezing out as much water as possible, I made four balls of curd and lowered them back into the hot whey to heat up. Then, lifting the balls out and wearing rubber gloves, I kneaded the curds, distributing the heat evenly.

I repeated this process times until the moment when I felt the elasticity of what was now cheese. As it cooled, it looked more and more like the mozzarella we all recognize. No, I didn't make it into the long, sticks of "string cheese." This was left in small mounds to be sliced. And it was delicious.

However, I did tell everyone I shared it with to be sure they



### Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts  
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enjoyed it. Yielding only about 16 ounces of cheese, I figured the recipe cost about \$1 a slice. Next time, I'll use the cheap milk.

-ob-

Artistic people are said to be temperamental, though I wouldn't know. I can't even draw stick people.

On the other hand, my 9-year-old granddaughter Taylor has an interest in art. To encourage her, her parents bought her a nice, portable easel, paints and a supply of canvases.

She has been working on a painting to enter in the Open Class at the county fair. It wasn't coming along as she would like, so she asked my advice.

"Honey, it's your picture," I said. "I don't know how you want it to look. G'ma can't tell you what to do."

Not the answer she wanted to hear, but I'm confident she'll figure it out. Sure hope so. We have to have entries in by noon today.

I'll leave the art to Taylor and I'll bake another apple pie. My pie got

a blue ribbon at another county fair I entered this year. Let's see if my luck holds.

Jim always encourages me to enter. He knows he'll get the "reject."

-ob-

Speaking of baking pie.... Taylor's father, Adam, has requested a cherry pie. And, since we're taking Taylor home later this week, I'd better keep the pie-crust mix out and keep baking. With this heat, I wish my oven was outside....

### From the Bible

A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright; but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.

Proverbs 15:1

## E-education isn't that great

By JOHN R. SCHROCK  
With the proliferation of cell phones, laptops and other hand-held electronics, parents soon may be deciding whether they want their newborn to have a paper or paperless life.

Choose electronics, and your child will get a 70 percent life. Though some Kansas high schools brag that they have gone paperless, and their students do all their schoolwork on laptops and Palm Pilots, this "revolution" is a case of the "emperor's new education." Few have dared point out that it doesn't work.

Reading an "e-text" on a digital screen, or conducting a class online presents the image of being techno-savvy. It has a track record of failure.

More than 15 years ago, award-winning industrial psychologist Charles Bigelow discovered that we read computer screens nearly 30 percent slower than we read print. This is due to our eye physiology and to the poor resolution of the media.

"Resolution" is a property we study in biology: how close can two dots appear before we see them as one. And screen resolution is poor. We would need ten times better resolution on screen to read

as fast as we can on paper. The new 1080-line HDTV only doubles the resolution, falling far short of solving this problem.

We also comprehend less. Forrester Research found our retention is 30 percent lower when we read online rather than in print.

The message for hi-tech, paperless schools is simple: If students are forced to do all classwork at lower speed and comprehension, they will need five years to learn the same material they would learn by reading conventional textbooks in four.

This should be no surprise to most of the reading public. E-books came out in the trade market with mystery and romance novels almost a decade ago. The experiment was a failure. Few people could read over 20 to 30 pages before the eye strain became unbearable.

We can and do read screens for bits of directory information. But we need the printed page when it comes to extended reading, from English literature to a biology textbook to a longer newspaper article.

We know this intuitively. What do we do when we find a lengthy article online? We print it off. And that is exactly what the students at the hi-tech high schools are doing:

printing off their literature and textbooks.

Virtual schools brag they are saving money on paper textbooks, but they are merely shifting the printing cost to the home.

Computer enthusiasts brag that online courses save trees, but research shows that the electronic age has generated more paper than ever before. And in printing off e-textbooks, the cost in time, inkjet cartridges and paper easily wipes out any savings, not to mention the energy used while trying to read text online.

The self-published product is shoddy and actually more expensive than a professionally published text. And it doesn't get recycled through other students.

When I hand this research to techno-educationists, proving their students are reading 30 percent slower and comprehending 30 percent less, thus needing to go to high school a fifth year, the response has been the same: just re-write the outcomes for high school.

Translated: just water down the expectations.

And the student's bill for new eyeglasses? That is not their problem.

Mr. Schrock is a professor of biology and department chair and lives in Emporia.

## Reader has 'oil crisis' solution

To the Editor:

The oil industry was deregulated in the 1970s, and immediately the price of gasoline went up. It was said we had a shortage of oil. At that time, we were importing about 24 percent of the oil we used.

The powers that be said "not to worry," as we would build the Alaskan pipeline and would have plenty of oil."

We are now importing close to 70 percent of our oil and the foreign oil-producing countries are robbing us.

So, our bone-headed politicians are saying to drill offshore for oil. This is not the immediate answer, as it would take about 10 years to get back to the gasoline pumps and by that time, we would have more severe shortages.

So to our congressional idiots

### Letter to the Editor

— who get paid \$205,000 a year to supposedly represent us, "We the People," in place of letting the lobbyists control you — why don't you represent us for a change.

Did you know, there is a ratio of 77 lobbyists for every congress person.

So what can be done quickly to get this energy problem on the mend? We have vast resources of natural gas. We need to get our cars and other gasoline-burning vehicles converted to natural gas. I would think that our government would foot the bill of 75 percent to 90 percent to do this.

We have a lot of coal, which is

a major source for energy, and the coal people are working hard to get it to burn cleaner. We need to get to work on wind and solar projects immediately, not 10 years from now.

Are we a "can do" nation that can quit blowing hot air and get down to business? This is a serious problem that needs immediate attention.

Jack D. Roberts  
Longmont, Colo.

PS: By the way, Lou Dobbs is not anti-immigration, but rather anti-ILLEGAL immigration.

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