

Opinion



Another Viewpoint

Energy bill a real porker

At the end of July, Congress passed a bloated \$85 billion energy bill that is packed with subsidies and tax breaks for big energy companies making billion dollar profits.

But even though this bill is more expensive than the one the president wanted, it appears that he is going lock the veto-pen drawer for another day.

Taxpayers are crying, but the industry is jumping for joy. After the energy measure passed, energy lobbyists from all over Washington celebrated over filet mignon and wine at their favorite D.C. steakhouses.

Alas, this bill gives hard-working American taxpayers nothing to celebrate: It won't lower prices at the pump, won't reduce our dependence on foreign oil, and won't spur on the innovation that our country needs.

In his February budget request, the president asked for an energy bill with no more than \$6.7 billion in tax breaks. This bill offers nearly twice that - it's got \$14.6 billion in breaks and \$3.1 billion in revenue raisers, for a total net cost of \$11.5 billion. That's too much money to be spending at a time of massive budget deficits - particularly for a bill that's not going to solve any of America's energy problems.

Sure, the president is busy, so we don't expect him to read through all 1,724 pages of this energy monstrosity.

But he might want to take a closer look at this bill before he signs it. Tucked away in the recesses is a cache of handouts to special interests, the kind of government giveaways that make taxpayers cringe.

Some of the worst include \$550 million for the Denali Commission, an organization whose only purpose is to funnel federal funds into Alaska. Another, \$1.5 billion goes for a new ultra-deepwater slush fund, money that will largely fund the Texas Energy Center. Some \$250,000 is for a study on "cold cracking" — an experimental way of refining petroleum by irradiating it. In July, the bill's authors all but admitted at a committee meeting that they had never even heard of cold cracking before. But — they added it into the bill anyway.

America does need a comprehensive energy policy, now more than ever. But this bill falls well short of the mark. Instead of crafting an innovative energy blueprint for the next generation, lawmakers chose to reward their campaign contributors with huge government handouts at the taxpayer's expense.

In his State of the Union address, the president pledged to cut the budget deficit in half over the next four years.

But this bill undermines his pledge by adding billions in spending over the next decade.

We share the president's concern that budget deficits are a major roadblock to our nation's economic growth, and we urge him to demonstrate a commitment to fiscal responsibility by sending this bill back to Congress with a veto. The nation deserves an energy policy that is not powered by pork.

We can do better than this package of government giveaways to mega-rich energy companies.

Jill Lancelot is president of Taxpayers for Common Sense — a non-partisan federal budget watchdog. www.taxpayer.net

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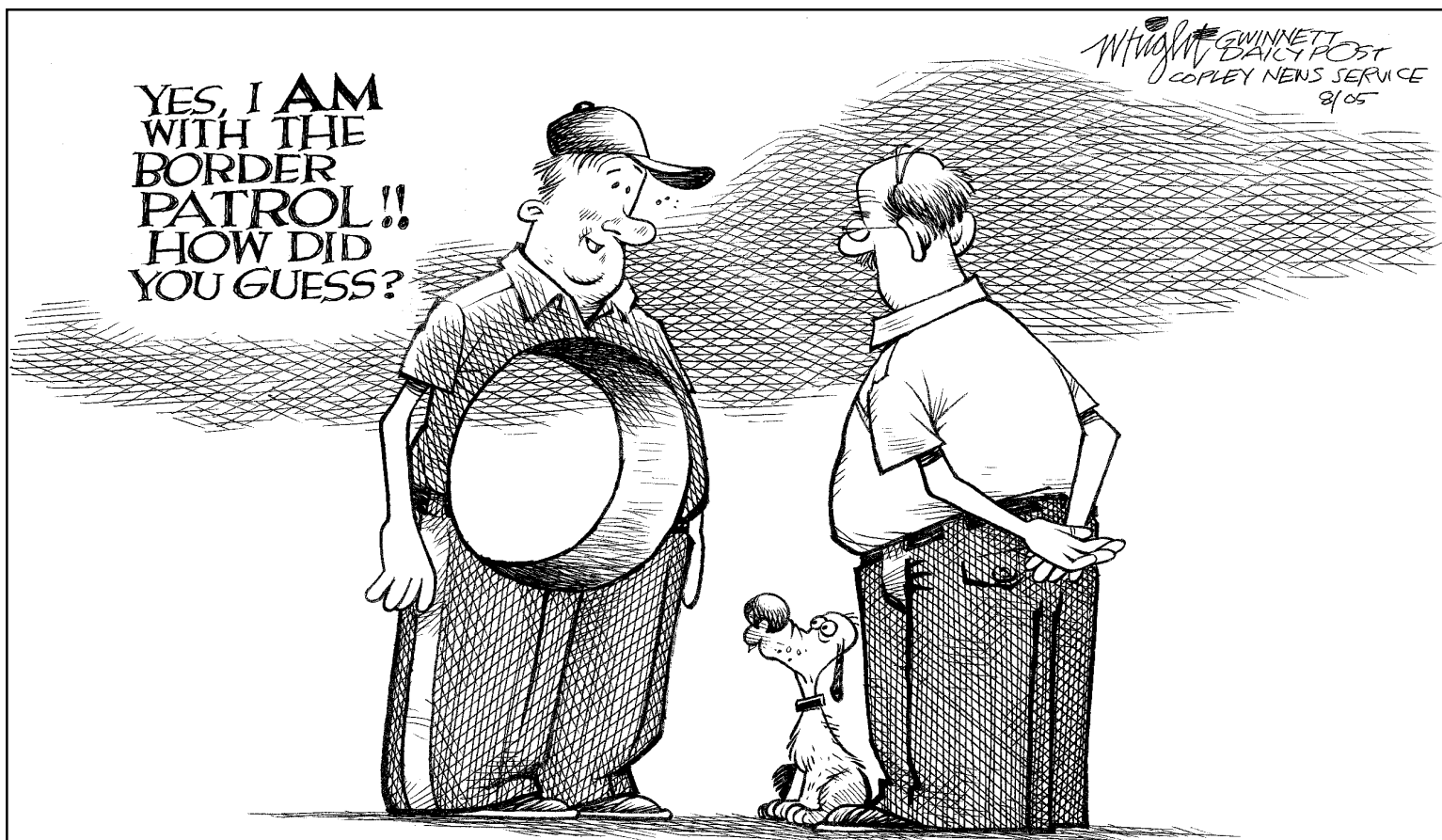
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Let nature take care of itself

Some brilliant ecologists this month put forth the suggestion that the Great Plains could be "re-populated" with large African animals.

"Large" and "African" meaning elephants, camels and lions. Yes, lions.

Their reasoning is that more than 10,000 years ago, the place we now call home was once the habitat of mammoths, sabre-tooth cats, camels and horses. The experts think it would be a good idea to return the area to what it once was. I'm all for conservation and protecting what we have but I don't think their idea was a good one.

Wild horses? Don't need 'em. However, they're not quite the problem the federal government has made them out to be. Less than one-tenth of one percent of all beef in this country is produced on public lands, so mustangs are hardly real competition.

Nor are deer or buffalo. Elk, however, on the basis of their numbers, could be.

(Last count a couple of years ago by the Colorado Division of Wildlife had their population estimated at more than 275,000 but they weren't sure.) Hunting hasn't helped reduce their numbers to a significantly manageable level.

The larger issue is wise and practical use of the resources already available, as in sound management practices, but that's an oxymoron of gargantuan proportions when applied to the feds.

So many elk result from taking their top predator out of the picture, namely the wolf.

I also don't think there are enough mountain lions eating elk to make a difference.

Have these so-called experts thought about disease?

Wildlife migration across state lines is already



Tisha Cox

• Off The Beaten Path

an issue in the United States, and just being where they shouldn't be is a problem.

Bison wandering out of the safety of Yellowstone National Park's borders are considered fair game because they carry brucellosis, which causes cattle to abort their calves.

Another favorite whipping boy is the gray wolf.

Wasting disease found in Colorado deer herds isn't a large problem in Kansas yet but that's mainly because wildlife officials monitor the herds.

There's also whirling disease in fish.

Non-native species are a huge problem around the United States and the rest of the world. Rabbits are one example.

Why would we want to create more problems with a species that's already suffering from human interference? Elephant numbers are down and the migration routes of many herds in Africa have been affected by human settlements and farming.

People don't seem to realize they're the interlopers and the animals are just trying to do what they've done for years.

I can't advocate turning the entire West into a

giant version of the San Diego Zoo. That's what national parks are for, as wildlife areas in general.

Such thinking will only cause more problems in the long run. Understanding is the key.

These creatures need us to butt out. That's how humans can help. Specifically, protecting these animals and their habitat is how we can help and then just leave them be.

The federal and state governments as well as municipalities have enough to worry about with local wildlife and resources, let alone the added burden of non-native species.

Small reptiles and mammals that aren't American natives have wreaked havoc where they're found.

If anyone thinks having an animal like a skunk in their backyard is a problem, just wait until there's an elephant. Or a lion.

A classic literal case of NIMB, also known as "not in my backyard."

The idea is an interesting gesture, even if half-baked. I think the more obvious and simpler solution is better understanding and management of what is already here.

People complain that reintroducing predator species is a waste of time and money. I can see both sides of such an issue but it's just one example of trying to restore the balance of nature.

But as I said, I think nature can take care of itself. We need to spend a little more time on our own problems.

Tisha Cox is a general assignment reporter/photographer for the Free Press. Her column appears on Mondays. tcoc@nwkansas.com.

Another act of kindness recalled

Last Friday we published a letter from Martha Collins, who wrote about a touching incident regarding her daughter's little friend, Dolly, and how a nice person stayed after hours to reunite the two.

It prompted a recollection that was strikingly similar to one my daughter and her special friend encountered many years ago.

It happened when our daughter was about three years old. We were on our way back home after visiting all the grandparents. While on the road, our little girl was getting hungry and so we stopped at a Dairy Queen about 150 miles from home. No sooner had we gotten back in the car, Tracy fell asleep the rest of the way home.

While carrying in the luggage, our daughter was patiently waiting for someone to unload Fuzzy. After the doors were shut and we were making the last trip into the house, we noticed Tracy was frantic about something. That something was Fuzzy and he wasn't with us or in her arms. It was horrible. Her dad and I went racing back to the car searching and going over every nook and cranny to find her little bear and all the while Tracy stood outside the car crying.

That was probably the first traumatic situation Tracy had to endure and as any parent knows, it can be even more traumatic to the mother and father — it was for us.

Sadly, Tracy slept that night without her bear and nothing we tried to do would console her.

The next day we retraced our steps mentally and the only possible location where Fuzzy could be was at that Dairy Queen. We weren't even sure of the town's name — but we found it.

My heart was pounding as I dialed the number and waited to talk to someone. After all, this bear looked like something that belonged in the trash. He wasn't soft anymore and certainly looked as if he belonged in Heaven rather than on earth.



Patty Decker

• Deep Thoughts

"Did you by any chance find an old beat-up looking bear yesterday?" I asked gritting my teeth.

"Did this bear look like it was loved?" the lady's voice said.

"Oh gosh, yes it did," I said.

"Yep, we sure do have a little bear fitting the description," she said.

The next step was getting Fuzzy home. At that time, we were poor college students and lived in a married dorm on campus. Money was tight and we didn't have the funds to drive all the way back to the location.

Before I could say anything else, the woman said, "We had already anticipated someone calling and the little bear is in a box ready to be mailed home — all we need is your address."

The lady said her child had a little animal that maybe wasn't quite as loved as Fuzzy, but close.

After thanking this kind woman repeatedly, the next step was to explain to our daughter where Fuzzy was since she was still heartbroken and sad.

As we looked at her tearful face, an idea popped into our heads.

"Fuzzy is on a vacation," we told her. "It's kind of like a little adventure for him, but he will be here in the next day or so."

True to her word, the kind lady did mail Fuzzy right away and within a day or two he was back at home safe and sound.

Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau

