

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

Greening Greensburg

From The Wichita Eagle

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius has proposed an intriguing idea for the future of Greensburg: rebuilding the tornado-ravaged town as a model of environmentally friendly efficiency.

The proposal could put Greensburg on the map as the “greenest town in rural America,” Sebelius said. It’s an exciting vision.

Because Greensburg’s infrastructure has been almost completely wiped out, it’s a rare “clean slate” opportunity for a community to rebuild using optimal design standards and new energy technology...

The greening of Greensburg could include new schools, residences and city offices that incorporate features such as higher levels of insulation and more efficient windows and air-conditioning systems.

Building green is the wave of the future, because it makes sense for the environment, for the economy and for people.

Hundreds of communities nationwide have begun to certify buildings using the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification, which measures how well buildings incorporate energy-saving features and technology. Building to the highest level of LEED certification adds about 5 percent on average to costs, according to the U.S. Green Building Council. But that can be recovered through long-term energy savings and health benefits...

Before the tornado, Greensburg had achieved modest fame for being home to what it billed as the World’s Largest Hand-Dug Well. Now, the town might really attract attention — and rebuild hope and pride — by modeling a clean, green future for the Midwest.

About those letters . . .

The *Free Press* encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and length, and, likewise, reserve the right to reject letters deemed to be of no public interest.

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail jvannostrand@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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Playing opossum

Last night, I was sitting outside reading, happily minding my own business until I saw something out of the corner of my eye. I set aside the book for a few seconds to see what it was.

At first, I thought it was a cat I saw moving along on the other side of the fence. But cats don’t have a shuffling gait. And I’ve never seen one with that shade of fur.

The tail clinched it. I was witnessing an opossum incursion into my neighborhood. Not 20 feet away, it seemed oblivious to my presence. Except for the brief instant it turned its fathomless beady eyes in my direction, but I don’t think it saw me.

Never once did it take its nose from the ground, sniffing for whatever it was looking for.

I can admit it took every bit of will power I had to stay still. I didn’t move, and held my breath until I couldn’t see it anymore.

I did stay outside a few more minutes, then packed it in. I didn’t want to have an even closer encounter with the wild marsupial.

That was the first opossum I’ve seen in my neighborhood since last October. In that case, the critter was calmly making its way across the street in front of my house as I was getting ready to turn the car into my driveway.

Coincidentally, last week, I did a story on wild-life in Colby, and how to deal with it. Both Chris Berens, a biologist with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks and Colby Police Chief Randy Jones said the best thing to do if one encounters a wild thing is to stay away, or look, but don’t touch.

It was the latest in a long line of opossum encounters stretching back a few years.

Thankfully, this one was not as big as the



Tisha Cox

• Off the beaten path

grandfather of all opossums I saw one night in my hometown.

On one of the first nights home from college for the summer, my sister and I were out driving around enjoying a nice evening and catching up on our time apart.

But that all stopped when the largest opossum I’ve ever seen before or since, scampered in front of the car. We just sat there in silence, watching it cross the road and then walk into the wheat field.

Since that encounter, and glimpsing the teeth and having experienced the hissing and growling, I have given opossums a wide berth.

Though they do look threatening, they aren’t exactly the most ferocious of creatures. However, you won’t catch me getting closer than the one came Sunday.

Here are some opossum facts:
The opossum is North America’s only marsupial, and like kangaroos, carries its young in a pouch. They give birth twice a year.

Opossums have 50 teeth, more than any other mammal.

Though they have prehensile tails, adults usually don’t hang from trees. Instead, they prefer the ground.

And of course, if threatened or provoked, they will play possum, or collapse and play dead. This condition lasts from a half-hour to four hours.

Another Preakness. . .

This year’s Preakness Stakes was Saturday at Pimlico track in Maryland. The race was a clean run, and the Kentucky Derby winner Street Sense was edged by a nose at the wire by Curlin.

However, the day was marred by the breakdown of a 5-year-old stallion named Mending Fences in one of the races before the Preakness.

He was euthanized on the track. He dislocated and fractured his right front ankle. Making it worse was the the skin was broken by the bone, which pretty much spells doom for a thoroughbred.

Of course, no one can forget what happened in last year’s Preakness — Kentucky Derby winner Barbaro standing, kicking with his shattered right hind leg after breaking it in that race. After two high profile breakdowns on the day of its biggest race, maybe officials there should consider changing the race surface.

I know I don’t want to watch a race only to have to hear that another animal was put down.

Horse racing is a huge industry, one that even has ties to Kansas, although more Quarter horses are raised here than thoroughbreds.

And maybe its time the Jockey Club realizes it needs to do more to protect its reason for existence.

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Solar power can cut global warming

By Andrew Korfhage
In the early 1980s, the future looked bright for solar energy.

The Carter administration had published the report “A New Prosperity,” detailing how emerging technologies and smart policy could together help the United States meet 28 percent of its electricity needs from renewable sources by the year 2000.

Before he left office, President Jimmy Carter installed a solar thermal water heater on the roof of the White House, and the government extended federal solar energy tax credits to homeowners so they could do the same. By the middle of the decade, spurred by the tax credit, solar companies were doing brisk business. For example, the American Solar King company sold solar water heating systems through a mainstream department store (Sears), and reported sales of more than \$30 million in 1985. But then something happened.

Under President Ronald Reagan, the federal tax credit for homeowners to choose solar energy was abolished. Reagan’s energy secretary shelved the “New Prosperity” study, and even the solar panels on top of the White House were torn down. Without the tax credit to drive business, companies like American Solar King folded and closed up shop.

Today, in 2007, we’re a long way from generating 28 percent of our energy from renewable sources, as envisioned almost 30 years ago. Last year, a slim 2.7 percent of our electricity came from renewables (excluding hydropower), and

of that, just 0.5 percent came from solar.

Just like 30 years ago, emerging technologies and smart policy can together help the United States change its energy mix — but only if we act now to implement better, faster, smarter policies that give the renewable energy industry a boost.

In congressional hearings in March, a scientist funded by the U.S. Department of Energy testified that if we do nothing, existing federal policy would barely lift the renewable portion of our current energy mix by even one percent over the next 20 years. The time is right for Congress to reinstitute robust tax credits and rebuild the market for solar energy that existed 30 years ago.

Right now, legislation introduced in both the House and the Senate is poised to do just that. The Securing America’s Energy Independence Act greatly increases the available federal tax credits established in 2005 for homeowners who choose solar energy. Originally capped in 2005 at \$2,000 per solar energy system, the new bills would remove the cap, offering \$1,500 per half-kilowatt of energy a system can produce. (A single-family household installing a photovoltaic system of around 5 kW would then be eligible for a generous credit of \$15,000.)

What’s more, the bills extend the credits’ deadline to the end of 2016, though if Congress fails to act, the original capped credits were set to expire at the end of this year. To spur development in the industry, experts say that long-term credits are key, and that short-term credits like those passed in 2005 create a “boom and

bust” effect within industries, triggering demand for only a short time, before the bottom falls out.

If Congress acts, Americans will follow. State-level programs have shown that tax incentives are the key, at least for now, to driving demand. States with generous state tax incentive programs lead the nation in solar usage, and states with no incentives trail behind. Solar energy can be that source of new prosperity about which the Carter administration report talked.

With the tax credits, people everywhere in the nation, will start buying it, and as a result, solar energy will start to achieve better economies of scale, setting off a chain reaction. Prices will come down, and solar can go up everywhere, creating jobs in every community that can’t be outsourced, giving our country a secure, clean source of energy that can help roll back climate change.

We can all start by giving Congress a push, contacting our representatives and voicing support for extending the tax credits, reminding our leaders of how solar energy can simultaneously increase our country’s energy security, reduce pollution, fight climate change, create jobs, and stimulate the economy. Then we can follow through by using the credits and watching a new day dawn on U.S. energy.

—Andrew Korfhage is an editor for Co-op America (www.coopamerica.org), a nonprofit consumer organization advocating socially and environmentally responsible purchasing and investing. Distributed by minutemanmedia.org.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

