



Free Press  
Viewpoint

Coal compromise  
shows a new style

Many Kansans were not prepared for the speed with which our new governor negotiated a compromise allowing one coal-fired power plant to be built near Holcomb in return for concessions to improve the environmental impact of the plant. The diligence with which Gov. Mark Parkinson moved on the issue contrasted with the two-year standoff engendered by his predecessor, Kathleen Sebelius, who left a record of conflict with the Republican-dominated Legislature. Her seat barely had time to cool as she flew off to be sworn in as secretary of Health and Human Service, and the deal was done. The agreement was all the more surprising, considering the fact that Gov. Parkinson had served in the Legislature as a Republican not that long ago. Still, many GOP leaders had predicted he would actually be easier for them to deal with than Mrs. Sebelius, a lifelong Democrat.

The former governor, now more concerned with Swine Flu than power plants for the time being, vetoed three bills meant to allow construction of the power plant. Her secretary of health rejected an air-quality permit for the plant on the grounds that it would produce carbon dioxide, and she stood squarely against any compromise that would have allowed it to be built.

It took just a matter of days for the new governor to show a different style. Maybe he is more effective because he has promised not to run for a full term. He had no need to grandstand. He and plant backers seem to have come to an agreement that is good for all concerned. The plant will be built, assuming everything goes as planned; western Kansas will get badly needed jobs; and rural electric customers in Kansas, Colorado and Texas will have the power they need.

Under the agreement, the owner, Sunflower Electric Power Corp. of Hays, said it will install “unprecedented” carbon mitigation to counter the plant’s emissions. The plant, the second on Sunflower’s Holcomb site, is expected to create up to 1,500 construction jobs and nearly 200 permanent jobs.

“We’re bringing people together to create hundreds of jobs, increase our renewable energy production and ensure a comprehensive energy plan for our state,” Parkinson said in a statement. “Prior to this agreement, the Legislature was at an impasse on energy issues. (Now) we can start to move forward.”

The agreement hinges on the Legislature passing a Comprehensive Energy Package proposed by Parkinson and Sebelius in January. Sunflower said that the company and its partners — Tristate Generation and Transmission Association of Colorado, Golden Spread Electric Cooperative of Texas and Midwest Energy of Hays, all consumer-owned cooperatives — will install, operate or purchase Kansas wind resources equal to 20 percent of the new plant’s output, or 179 megawatts.

Sunflower also promised to add renewable energy to its portfolio five years sooner than planned, use “biomass” for 10 percent of the plant’s fuel if possible, build two transmission lines to move coal and wind power to electricity-hungry Colorado and stop using two older plants.

While the fear of global warming from carbon emissions is real, Sunflower says it can capture or offset almost half the increase. Many arguments against the plant were spurious at best: opponents claimed that most of the power would be exported while pollution stayed in Kansas, for instance, but the same could be said of any product the state produces.

This agreement is an impressive accomplishment and a fine way to start a new administration. Hats off to our new governor. — *Steve Haynes*

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Vacuumping robot earns a fanfare

1812 buzzed, whirred, went around the corner and headed straight for Louie, the cat, who hissed and backed up.

The daily cleanup ritual was underway at eldest daughter’s house, and her three cats and two dogs weren’t any more approving of the process than they had been a week previously when 1812 first arrived.

Our son-in-law got a deal on a used Roomba, a saucer-shaped floor-cleaning robot. He brought it home.

Daughter is delighted. Now instead of having to get out the vacuum to deal with the tons of animal hair left all over her floors by her menagerie, she hits a button each morning and the little robot comes out from under an end table and spends about a hour going over her floors in a seemingly haphazard – but apparently effective – pattern.

The robot looks a little like a round laptop computer on wheels. It has a button on top you push to get it started. It then scuttles around the house, over entryways and rugs, vacuuming and brushing the floor. It goes into corners and under any piece of furniture where it can fit, making a quiet mechanical whirring sound. When it’s done, it returns to its docking station, which is at an outlet under an end table, and settles down to relax and recharge.



Cynthia Haynes

- Open Season

My daughter loves it. I love it. I want one. I need one. I will have one.

My son-in-law named his little friend 1812 because that was the name of a robot in some movie or television show. A friend, who got one at the same time, named his Sonny, apparently the name of the machine in the movie “I Robot.” (And iRobot is the name of the company that makes the Roomba.)

Son-in-law, a programmer, says he’s going to teach 1812 the overture of the same name. I figure that the cannon fire could come when 1812 returns to his nook under the end table — or maybe to clear the animals out when he goes to work.

There are apparently hundreds of photos on the Internet of children, cats and kittens riding on or sleeping on working Roombas. However, in the Haynes-Wilets household in Georgia, no

one is going to be getting a free ride. The dogs both weigh close to 100 pounds and the cats — Louie, Sabine and Marcell — aren’t having anything to do with the little interloper.

The other night we caught son-in-law using 1812 to clean out the back end of his Explorer.

“This is so going to be in my column,” I said with a grin.

My column is sort of infamous among the children, especially the sons-in-law.

He just grinned. He knows he struck gold with this gift — his wife loves it, his mother and mother-in-law both want one and his sister’s already gone out and bought a fancier model.

Now, mind you, Christmas and my birthday have already passed, but if a Roomba doesn’t appear in my house by July, Steve’s getting one for his birthday.

What! Blackmail? How can you say that? I wouldn’t think of it.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor’West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes @ nwkansas.com

State insurance regulations guide well

If the United States intends to strengthen the financial system, we should move quickly to pass measures that add checks and balances to the regulatory process, not remove them.

Our current system of insurance regulation is under attack by large insurance organizations and members of Congress. Proposed reforms would remove successful state regulation in favor of federal oversight. But state regulation has, in fact, guided insurance companies through many financial solvency issues.

State-based insurance regulation hasn’t contributed to the current U.S. financial condition. Far from it. Let me explain.

State insurance departments serve the public interest by providing fair, prompt treatment for our local consumers. We also serve to promote competitive insurance markets. As a result, the insurance industry has remained relatively calm in otherwise turbulent financial times.

State insurance oversight has kept insurance companies stable and protected policyholders from the worst of the financial meltdown. Through current regulations, companies can meet their obligations to the individuals and businesses who, as policyholders, have put their trust in them. That can’t be said, however, for other financial services businesses that failed under federal regulation in the past year.



Sandy Praeger

- Kansas Ins. Commissioner

In Kansas, this state system protects policyholders by effectively monitoring more than 1,600 insurance companies that generate nearly \$20 billion in premiums in the state. The Kansas Insurance Department also licenses and regulates more than 90,000 agents, both resident and non-resident.

As we think about national financial reform efforts, we need to better identify and manage risk in the financial system by updating federal regulatory structures that are outside the scope of insurance regulation. But we have to do it in a collaborative manner. State insurance regulation must remain part of the process.

Financial regulators at all levels need the ability to consult about emerging issues and trends, allowing for early identification and swift action on issues that could potentially affect the larger economy. For this, the 13,000 people who work in state insurance departments throughout the United States have

unique expertise and experience to lend. State departments can scan markets, see problems and react quickly. Regulators are trained to watch out for each other.

We in the state-based regulatory system want to work with the Obama Administration and Congress to help enact responsible, inclusive reform efforts. That’s why I have shared key ideas for regulatory reform with our Kansas congressional delegation and with federal officials.

I trust that U.S. Senators Roberts and Brownback, as well as U.S. Representatives Moran, Jenkins, Tiahrt and Moore, will help us retain the successful state-based regulation.

We can continue providing stability to the insurance sector by relying on much of what already works.

Sandy Praeger is the Kansas Commissioner of Insurance and immediate past president of the National Association of Insurance Commissioners.

The Kansas Insurance Department, established in 1871, assists and educates consumers, regulates and reviews companies and licenses agents selling insurance products in the state. More about the department is online at www.ksinsurance.org.

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

