# )pinion



### **Free Press** Viewpoint

### What's the effect of geothermal heat?

The announcement last week that a Kansas community college has snared a grant to help pay for converting its campus to geothermal heating and cooling sounds great. It'll be widely applauded, but it's a little frightening.

Geothermal systems take heat out of the ground in the winter and put it back in summer, much like a heat pump takes heat out of the air. A few systems are hardly likely to affect the environment, but there's a symptom here of a larger problem.

We don't really know how "alternative" energy sources will affect our home planet, because to date, we haven't had much experience with them. Wind, solar, geothermal, water (wave, current or gravity), all these so-called "green" sources are mostly unknowns.

It's true they won't directly produce the "greenhouse" gases so feared today as a cause of global warming, so they may be an improvement, but what exactly they will do the environment as a whole — we really don't know. In a sense, we're in the same position with this as industrial

society was a century or two ago, when we were just launching our heavy use of fossil fuels. Burning fossil fuels for energy is easy – they burn, you capture part of the heat – but inefficient. The more we've burned,

the more efficient we've become. But it's still primitive. While wind and solar systems are the most popular, proposals range from geothermal to dozens of way to harness water power. Each will have its environmental price, a price which

may not be apparent without years of experience. That's because every transfer of energy involves the basic principles of physics, one of which is that for every action, there's an equal and opposite reaction.

So consider the possibility, as we move more and more to alternative power, that thousands of wind generators spring up on the plains of Mid America. Energy is removed from the atmosphere and transferred to the east and west coasts, where the bulk of the population lives.

Could that someday affect the weather? Of course.

If you move enough energy, you're transferring heat from one place to another. Thousands of wind generators might affect the weather, often in ways no one will predict.

Wind speeds altered? Weather in the Midwest cooler? Over the Atlantic, warmer? Could be. No one knows for sure.

And if thousands of solar panels someday line the Southwest, could that remove enough heat to affect the climate there? Quite possible. Again, no one knows what the long-term impact might be.

Geothermal systems? Build enough of them, you're sure to affect the underground foundations of our continent. Rocks might get cooler far below, water sources could be altered or disturbed, flows changed, no one knows. The result could be

everything from dry wells to earthquakes. All we really know is we've heard that fossil fuels are bad for us and we're searching for better alternatives. And those seem apparent, but without careful study, how do we know

they're really an improvement over what we have? The answer is, we don't. We're just poking around in the

This is not to say we shouldn't look for better energy sources; just that any major change like this demands careful study. Otherwise, we will pay a price no one can measure today.

That's a scary prospect. — Steve Haynes

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### Go ahead and use that extra anchovy

I love reading cookbooks and recipes out of magazines and newspapers, but it really bugs me when they want you to put in 1 tablespoon of tomato sauce or 2 teaspoons of green-bean juice.

HERDING

Don't these people know this stuff comes in cans? What the heck are you supposed to do with the rest of a can of tomato sauce - or green bean juice?

The classic is our favorite recipe for Caesar Salad, which we got out of "The Joy of Cooking."

It calls for five anchovy filets.

What! Do these people think you buy anchovies at the local fish market?

They come in a can with about 10 filets to a can, and I have absolutely no use in the world for spare anchovies. (Don't even think about pizza! It's not happening.)

I don't care for fish. I really don't care for anchovies. But once they're all smushed up in my dressing, they're just a flavoring.

So instead of hanging on to five leftover anchovies, we just put the whole can in the mixer and blend 'er up. Our dressing is a little salty, but it has a lot of flavor and I don't have any leftover anchovies.

The other problem recipe I use fairly often is Jackie Kennedy's Beef Stroganoff, which I got out of a Rural Electric Co-op newsletter.

I don't know if Jackie Kennedy ever came



Season near this recipe but it's pretty good — except

need for my morning cereal or afternoon ham I put in the whole can. It's a small can, after

it calls for 3 teaspoons of tomato paste. That

leaves you with an open can. Not something I

all, and the result is delicious. So my theory is to go all the way. Now, I wouldn't suggest that for spices or something that comes in a bottle that can be resealed and used for another purpose. But, a little extra tomato paste sure doesn't hurt this dish, and what Jackie's family - or the White House chef – don't know isn't hurting any of us.

So here's the recipe: Jackie Kennedy's Beef Stroganoff

2 pounds boneless beef sirloin.

Salt and pepper to taste.

3 teaspoons flour.

4 teaspoons butter, divided. 2 cups beef broth.

1/2 cup sour cream

3 teaspoons (or a whole can) tomato paste. 1/4 cup grated onion.

Sliced fresh mushrooms.

Cut beef into thin strips and season with salt and pepper. Cover and let stand in a cool place for two hours (or as long as you figure you can delay dinner). In a large skillet, whisk flour and three tablespoons butter over low heat until mixture bubbles and forms a smooth paste. Slowly add broth, stirring constantly until mixture thickens. Let boil two minutes.

Reduce heat and add sour cream, alternating with tomato sauce, still whisking. Simmer slightly for one minute. Do not boil.

In a separate skillet, brown beef and onion in remaining butter over medium heat. Add contents of meat pan to sauce, season with salt and pepper. Simmer gently for 20 minutes.

You might note that this recipe never says what to do with the mushrooms. I use a full package and add them along with the can of tomato paste.

When done, serve this over noodles (we use fettucini). It makes enough for a state dinner, so be prepared to freeze some for next week and the week after.

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

## nemployment fund presents problems

The Senate agreed with the House position to firm up the state's Unemployment Fund. Labor Secretary Jim Garner says he believes the fund will get so low, we will need to borrow from the federal government to meet our obligations to the unemployed.

The fund is financed by taxes assessed on each Kansas business in accordance to their historical use of the fund. Employers are classified in three types in Kansas: positive employers who have paid more into the fund than their employees have taken out in benefits, negative employers who have paid less into the fund than their laid-off employees have received in benefits, and new employers who have no historical experience.

All new employers pay in at 4 percent of taxable payroll, determined on the first \$8,000 of the base salary earned by each employee during a calendar year, for 24 months except for construction companies, which pay in at 6 percent before they are rated for experience.

Garner testified last year that the fund was stable and could probably weather the worst of downturns. When he sent out notices of the new tax rate to businesses in December, I received calls and letters about 400 to 700 percent increases in unemployment taxes. Businesses said they could not afford their payments, due in April, as it would only compound their unemployment problem by requiring additional worker layoffs in order to pay the tax.

Businesses then asked the Legislature to adopt the original 2010 tax rates as determined by Secretary Garner. The rates were a true reflection of each business's experience and use of the fund. When the Department of Labor calculated the original 2010 rates, they wouldn't bring in the amount needed to meet the planned yield required by law, so they "compressed" the rates, causing positive employers with little experience to be charged



#### Ralph Ostmeyer

State Senator

astronomical increases.

The secretary anticipates the original 2010 schedule will cause Kansas to borrow an additional \$150 million over the next two years to prop up the Unemployment Insurance Fund. Regardless of who the next governor is, he or she will inherit a problem that will require a lot more money and probably policy changes.

In my Feb. 26 newsletter, I failed to mention \$4.4 million of the \$9 billion lost to tax exemptions between 1995 and 2009 was the reduction in property taxes. This amount represents the difference between 35 mills for school funding versus the current 20 mills. The change was made in the mid 1990s following property revaluation. When property values were adjusted upward to market value, the mill rate was supposed to be lowered so that the higher property values generated the same amount of property tax, which had increased 96 percent between 1995 and 2008.

Visitors to our office this past week included students of the government class at Northern Valley High School from Almena. It is always a pleasure to have the students visit and we appreciate Jason Dibble's annual efforts to have them experience firsthand our state government in action.

Highlights of Senate action this past week: Special Education: SB 359 amends the special education catastrophic state aid law by increasing the student eligibility amount from \$25,000 to twice the amount of state aid paid

per special teacher in the preceding school year. The bill makes any federal or state special education aid a deduction in computing the entitlement under catastrophic aid. The bill would reduce state special education catastrophic aid from \$12 million in FY 2009 to \$2 million in the current year. Passed 33 to 7 on Thursday. I voted for this bill.

Text Messaging and Primary Seat Belt Law: HB 2437 makes it unlawful for a person to use a handheld wireless communication device for text messaging or e-mail while driving. A first conviction for this offense would be a traffic offense and second and subsequent convictions a class B misdemeanor. Persons convicted of text messaging or e-mailing while driving who cause serious injury to another person would be guilty of a class A misdemeanor.

The bill contains the same provisions as SB 351 and SB 483, which both passed the Senate this year. Passed 27 to 12 on Thursday. I voted against this bill.

Vehicle Dealers and Manufacturers Licensing Act: HB 2547 amends the law to prohibit manufacturers from stopping a dealer from acquiring, adding or maintaining another franchise and from making certain requirements for facilities if the requirements are unreasonable because of financial and economic conditions.

The bill also changes the time where a newly purchased truck, truck tractor or any combination thereof could be operated under temporary registration conditions from 48 hours to 30 days. Passed 40 to 0 on Thursday.

I can be reached by writing to Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th Street, Room 225-E, Topeka, Kan., 66612, or call (785) 296-7399. My e-mail address is Ralph. Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov.

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