



Free Press  
Viewpoint

Utopian world  
means facing reality

Mixed in with the hype and hysteria about global warming is a group of people who, deep in their hearts, hope the recession will last, the seas will rise, the next drought or hurricane will prove them right.

These people want to see modern agriculture turned out to pasture and return us to the days when everyone had to grow all or part of their own food, scratching out a meager existence on small plots of land.

They see production agriculture as evil, an enemy of the land, and corn as the devil’s tool, ruining our environment and health. They believe, with the fervor of an old-time revival preacher, that the world will be better if we give up air conditioning, cars, oil, jet airplanes and coal-fired power plants.

And there is a fine line between this bunch and reality.

We’d all be better off if we grew some of our own food, and it’s not that hard to do in your backyard. One 30-something we know says you start being more healthy when you graze on the “outer ring” of the grocery, fresh produce, fresh meat, fresh dairy products, and stay away from the canned, the preserved and the prepared, anything that’s white and anything containing high-fructose corn syrup.

It makes sense to clean up our environment, including those coal-fired power plants; turn up the air-conditioning; and turn down the furnace. Walking more and driving less would be good for us, as individuals and for the obesity epidemic.

It makes sense to worry about endangered species and polluted rivers, but not to spend billions and billions of dollars to get another 1 or 2 percent of the contaminants out of drinking water. Heck, 10 to 20 years ago, science couldn’t even measure some of the amounts the dogooders want to ban today.

Much of the fuzzy thinking on these issues gets done at the Land Institute, an ultraliberal think tank near Salina, where an author is to discuss his new book, “The End of Growth: Adapting to Our New Economic Reality,” on Sunday.

Richard Heinberg, a “senior fellow” at something called the Post Carbon Institute in Santa Rosa, Calif., told a reporter he advocates measuring our economy not by the gross domestic product, but on something he calls “Gross National Happiness.” He says the idea was developed in Nepal.

“If we plan, we can have an economy that is dynamic and supports people,” he said. “It can be like an ecosystem ... some services would do better than others, we’d still have innovations, just like we have now.”

Whatever. The key phrase there is, “if we plan,” as in planned economy. As if the Soviets hadn’t proved the case against that.

But without modern agriculture, how will we feed a big and growing world? Without continued exploration and development of resources, how will we make it run?

And when the planners miss the mark, who will pick up the pieces? Government? Sure, the government is efficient and knows exactly how to make things work. We all know that.

The real question is, do we get to make up our own minds about what we eat and how it’s grown, or do Mr. Heinberg and the Post Carbon Institute do that for us? Do we get to eat meat or tofu? Grow hybrid tomatoes or heirloom? Eat fresh food or stuff doused with corn syrup.

For the Gross National Happiness would be a lot higher, we suspect, if people get to make up their own minds about these things and not have someone do it for them. But that’s just a guess.

— Steve Haynes

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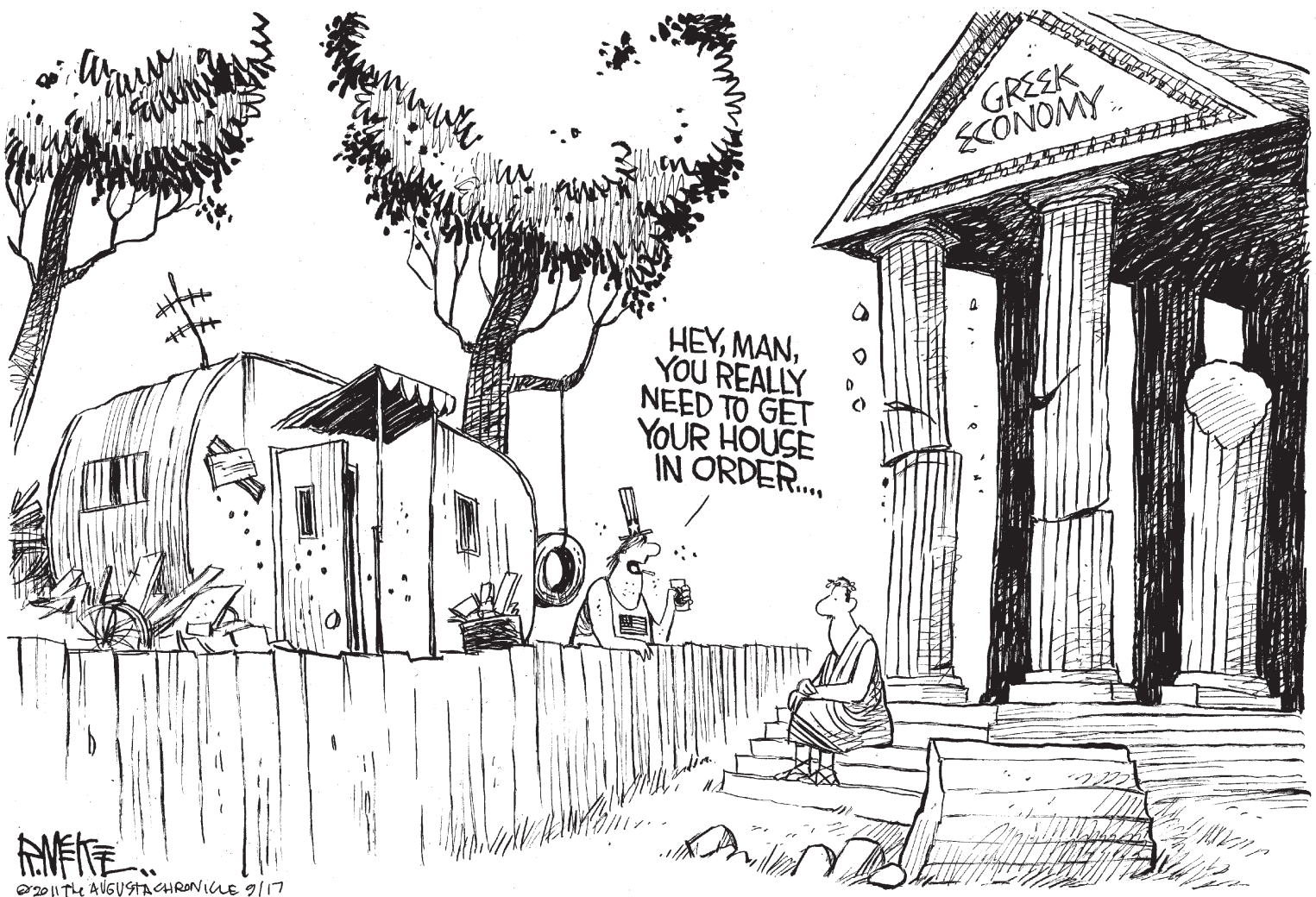
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They moved the road – or town – again

My sister and I decided that we needed to see relatives in Arkansas. We do this in the fall every year or two.

Mom died in June, and Uncle Jeff, Aunt Frances and cousins Judy and George came from Arkansas to be with us.

Jeff is mother’s last living sibling, a brother just a year younger and a fit 85.

We decided that we needed to go see Jeff and Frances and on the way, we would visit with as many of our other cousins as we could find.

Now I can’t find my way around the block without getting lost, and my sister isn’t a whole lot better, but we had a Garmin global positioning system. How could we get lost driving the roads we’d gone on with our mother dozens of times?

Let me count the ways.

We got off to a good start in my sister’s car with her driving. We didn’t even get the Garmin out of the trunk. We just headed south from Concordia to Wichita.

Since we couldn’t leave until after she got off work on Wednesday, we were a little late getting going and little sister doesn’t like to drive at night. I took over and guided us on to Tulsa. All was going well, if you didn’t count the 20-mph off ramp I didn’t see any too soon and took at 50 on about 2 1/2 wheels.

After that we decided to stop at Sand Springs, a Tulsa suburb, and find a motel. The next morning, she said that I could drive again. Sneaky little thing. She didn’t want to drive through the city. But, hey, we got the Garmin out of the trunk to guide us through the tricky spots.

The first problem occurred when we ran into road construction. The Garmin’s couldn’t re-configure our trip fast enough. Just as it said to turn at Exit 34A, we looked over to see that the



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

exit was two lanes over.

Miraculously, we got through Tulsa with only two wrong turns, enduring two miles of four-lane-traffic backed up due to an accident on a one-lane bridge that was under construction. We figured we were lucky we weren’t heading for work.

The rest of the trip was a piece of cake, except that we found that we were headed for the wrong town. Our uncle wanted to meet us at Cousin George’s house at Clinton and we were headed for the old home place at Dardanelle. Well, they are only about 40 miles from each other as the crow flies. We didn’t have a crow, and it’s two hours as the mountain roads curve, so we just kept driving. This time, it was Marie who took a couple of wrong turns, but we eventually got there.

We had a good visit with the relatives, but we still hadn’t seen the old home place or visited our grandparents’ graves, so we headed back to Dardanelle.

As we left, George asked if we knew the way. We assured him that we did, drove out of his yard and turned the wrong way as he stood there with his hand in the air in a final goodbye. He was probably wondering how we would ever find our way back to Kansas.

In Dardanelle, Cousin Judy took us around so we couldn’t get lost, fed us and sent us on our way.

We were doing fine as we crossed into Okla-

homa, but worried how we would get back through Tulsa.

As I navigated the first curve into the city, and noticed I was driving through Tulsa again, I came up behind a school bus for the Sandites. A quick check of the sides proved that it was a Sand Springs School District bus.

I tailed that bus like a stalker and prayed it would lead us through the maze.

It twisted and turned, changed lanes, took off ramps and on ramps that said everything but Sand Springs, but led us across the city and straight home.

If it hadn’t been for that school bus, we might still be trying to get out of Tulsa.

We did pretty good from there until we got to Wichita. We got off and spent the night and the next morning couldn’t figure out how to get home.

My sister swore we weren’t supposed to get back on the Kansas Turnpike but Garmin kept sending us there. We came up to the toll booth three times before I told her that as we had tried the other three directions, we might as well go through and see where it got us. By that point, I figured we had spent more in gas and frustration than the toll would cost.

The next sign said I-135 North. That was our road.

Now where was a school bus when you needed one?

Our husbands just shook their heads. They know better than to try to give us directions.

But I think I did hear one of them laugh.

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

Prepare the ground for biofuels

Other  
Opinions

• Adrian Polansky  
Farm Service Agency

commodities with time-tested markets. The chicken-or-egg challenge is whether crops can be grown before facilities are built, or whether facilities can be financed without enough crops established? Somebody must go first.

The Biomass Crop Assistance Program, created in the 2008 Farm Bill, takes those first steps. By helping farmers and forest landowners with start-up costs, the program ensures that enough non-food crops will be established in time for next-generation biorefineries to operate.

This summer, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced more than \$80 million for farmers to grow crops like miscanthus, switchgrass, poplar and camelina, sowing the seeds of up to 7,000 new jobs.

Here in Kansas, producers in eligible counties of two distinct project areas can receive funds to begin growing new crops. In one project area, they can grow switchgrass, big bluestem, Illinois bundleflower and purple prairie clover, or existing suitable stands of

America needs real solutions for reducing our dependence on imported energy. It’s no secret that answers can be found on the farms and in the forests of Kansas rather than oil fields overseas.

In 2007, Congress enacted the Renewable Fuels Standard, requiring 36 billion gallons of biofuels by 2022, of which no more than 15 billion gallons can come from corn starch. Whereas more than 13 billion gallons of ethanol is now in the national fuel pool, only 3 million gallons of non-corn starch fuels might be made next year.

That’s a dilemma. While it has taken America more than 20 years to produce more than 10 billion gallons of ethanol using a crop grown for centuries, now we have just 10 years to produce another 20 billion gallons using new feedstocks.

What feedstocks are available? Last month, the Department of Energy issued “The Billion Ton Study,” which estimates up to 1.6 billion tons of energy biomass could be harvested sustainably by 2030 from America’s farms and forests without affecting food, feed and fiber.

So the real question isn’t how much, but when. Many existing farm and forest residues – corn stover, cobs, bark and broken limbs – are uneconomically retrievable. Newly grown crop supplies may need years to mature before harvesting. Producers unfamiliar with new cultivars need education, training, practice and financial assurance to venture from known

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