

Free Press Viewpoint

Pipeline protests about status quo

Environmental protesters today are trying to block construction of the Keystone XL pipeline, designed to carry oil imported from vast Canadian tar-sands fields to the central U.S. And while the protestors claim a leak could foul the great Ogallala aquifer as it crosses Nebraska's Sand Hills, that is no more likely than any other of the dozens of pipelines crisscrossing the nation.

This battle is not about leaks – that talk basically is just fear mongering – but about making oil more expensive, harder to get and less useful – and oddly enough, keeping the U.S. dependent on Arab suppliers.

The decision will be made, by the U.S. Department of State, not the Interior Department or the Environmental Protection Agency, which deal routinely with such issues.

The State Department held a hearing in Lincoln, Neb., last month where supporters and opponents jeered each other. Environmentalists claimed a leak could devastate the Ogallala, ignoring the fact that pipelines are a reasonably safe means of transporting oil. They shut down automatically when a leak crops up, for one thing.

Supporters said the line would bring jobs and badly needed, dependable supplies of oil.

Perhaps the real agenda slipped from one environmentalist: opponents don't like the open-pit mining process used to recover the sands, or the cooking it takes to extract the oil.

"We cannot afford to spill this toxic tar sands oil into our soil or groundwater," one declared.

But the Canadians have already developed the fields, and someone will burn this oil. Why shouldn't the U.S. have a steady, dependable supply that doesn't have to move in super-tankers? And come to think of it, which is worse: an unseen pipeline across the midlands, safe from most hazards, from terrorism to storms, or a tanker floating on the seas and passing through jihadist-infested waters off war-torn nations?

Indications are the \$7 billion project will be approved, though that's far from certain. The builders claim it'll meet and exceed environmental and safety standards. The environmentalists are just against it.

Anyone interested in keeping the economy afloat on the High Plains, or in having a steady, dependable and reasonably priced supply of oil, might want to come down on the side of the builders. We need the oil, and we sure need the jobs.

– Steve Haynes

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Treasures, trash unearthed in cleanout

We've been talking about updating our kitchen for about 10 years.

We've been doing a lot more talking this year. We've talked to the bank. We've talked to the cabinet maker. We've talked to the flooring guy.

The bank said yes. The cabinet maker and flooring guy showed us samples and we're ready to go.

But first there's a little matter of the old cabinets.

I'm not worried about what to do with the old cabinets. They can be moved to the garage or basement and put to use holding leftovers, spares, parts and assorted junk — the second half of a two-light bulb pack, unused garden seeds, garden fertilizer, bug spray, charcoal, and all the other debris that clutters up every flat surface.

What I have to do now is clean them out — before the cabinet guys get here.

And if you've ever moved, you know that that's an incredible job.

I've lived in this house about 18 years now, but I haven't forgotten the incredible amount of junk that can be hiding in the kitchen cabinets.

Since the cabinets are still being made, I should have a month or so to clean everything out. I think.

I've started at the top. Above the cabinets, I had my antique Pyrex bowl sets, just like the ones my mother got as wedding presents 65



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

years ago. You know the ones, nesting bowls, yellow, green, red and blue. Most of the sets had been sitting up there undisturbed for at least 10 years.

Do you know how much dust, grime, grease and filth can collect on anything that isn't moved or touched for 10 years?

Each bowl had to be hand washed and dried, wrapped in newspaper and placed in a box. It took about a week just to clear the tops of the cabinets.

Then I started on the top rows — the ones that neither Steve nor I can reach without a step stool or small ladder. These shelves contain large pieces of Corningware used once a year at Thanksgiving, plastic glasses, ceramic mugs and unused glassware.

Since these things had been in the cabinets and actually used once in every blue moon, they just needed to be wrapped and packed.

Next, I went on to the food odds-and-ends shelves. This is where I put the cider spice mix, tea bags, ultra-fancy mustard and bags of this and that.

Most of the tea was so old it could apply for Social Security. I found things in there with labels that weren't even in English. I mean really, I don't know what language it was — Japanese maybe?

These treasures filled a trash bag, but at least nothing crawled out of any of the ancient food-stuffs.

So far, I have 10 boxes all neatly taped and labeled in the basement. But I still haven't touched the stuff we use every week. The plates, silverware, knives and utensils, pots and pans, plastic tubs for leftovers, cups, bowls and food we actually use, including condiments, flour, sugar, coffee and cereal.

I know that I'm going to get that call — "We'll be there tomorrow," and panic. Everything will get dumped into whatever boxes, bags or baskets I have left and dragged to the basement. I'll end up with 10 to 15 neatly labeled boxes of stuff I never use and won't be able to find a skillet, plate and fork to make a scrambled egg.

I guess Steve will just have to take me out to eat for a week or so.

Gee, that would be so bad, wouldn't 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

School funding formula badly broken

Data from the Kansas Department of Education shows school districts' unencumbered operating carryover cash reserves (excluding capital, debt and federal funds) as of July 1 were at a record-high \$868.3 million. All last year districts said funding shortfalls were prompting them to cut teachers and programs. Meanwhile, most districts didn't spend all of their state and local tax aid and increased their operating carryover cash reserves by \$85.7 million.

This isn't a one-time phenomenon; 2011 was the sixth consecutive year (since the courts said schools were under-funded) that some state and local tax aid was used to increase operating carryover cash reserves. Total operating carryover increased by \$410.1 million since 2005.

If the school funding formula is consistently providing more money than necessary to operate schools, we should put the money where it's really needed or give it back to taxpayers. That may be a controversial statement, but we can't let controversy get in the way of providing kids with a quality education and a fiscally stable state after they graduate.

A large portion of the buildup in carryover cash is in funds set aside for Special Education, academically at-risk and bilingual students. The balances in these funds alone have grown by \$164.5 million; their total is \$314.4 million. This is money specifically allocated by the funding formula for those purposes; the fact that this much apparently wasn't needed is a clear indication that the formula is badly broken.

Kansas Policy Institute has been researching this issue since 2009. At first, some districts said the money wasn't there; others said it existed at one point but had been spent. Still others

Other Opinions

• **Dave Trabert**
Kansas Policy Inst.

ers said the cash existed but couldn't be spent.

There is a legitimate issue of needing some degree of carryover to manage cash flow, especially since the state has been late sending money to districts over the last two years. But even that reason has an element of 'the dog ate my homework' for many districts.

Data collected from the Kansas Department of Education shows that districts' operating carryover ratio last year (beginning carryover cash divided by operating costs) ranged from 1 percent (Haven) to 64 percent (Lewis), with the median at 16 percent. If Haven and dozens of other districts consistently manage cash flow with less than 10 percent carryover cash ratio, those with ratios of 20 percent or greater could do so with much smaller carryover balances.

Fortunately, the Legislature recognized the absurdity of having carryover cash pile up and gave schools full authority to transfer carryover balances from previously-restricted funds to offset up to \$156 million in Base State Aid reductions over the last two years. (Another quirk of the formula caused base state aid to decline even though total state aid increased.) The Department of Education reports that only a small portion has been put to use so far.

The school funding formula should be based on what it costs to achieve required outcomes

and also have districts operating and organized in a cost-effective manner.

Believe it or not, that wasn't the basis of the last school lawsuit.

How's that for a broken system?

Dave Trabert is President of Kansas Policy Institute. He most recently authored "Kansas County Budget Analysis - In Search of Efficient Government" and "Volume III: Analysis of K-12 Spending in Kansas" in A Kansas Primer on Education Funding. He graduated from West Liberty State College.



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Mallard Fillmore

• **Bruce Tinsley**

