

from our viewpoint...

Building plants part of cleaner future

Kansas stands at a crossroad, and the development of the Sunflower Electric Power plants planned near Holcomb is an essential part of the economic future of the western part of the state — and our neighbors to the west and south.

These plants and one being built by Goodland Energy Resources are a vital element to the growth and stability of the state and for providing cleaner energy.

Everyone wants cleaner power, and the plants at Caruso and Holcomb would be the cleanest in the region, possibly the country.

People say wind power is cleaner — and we must develop more of it, not just depend on the coal and multi-fuel plants being proposed.

Wind power is important, and it will be a big part of the future. However, all the wind power plants now in production or planned over the next five years will not produce more than 20 percent of the total power consumption of the U.S. That will barely keep up with increasing demand for electricity. It does not expand the base-load capacity or replace older generation plants that do not meet today's emission standards.

Besides building two large power plants to sell power to Kansas cities and to rural cooperatives in Colorado and Texas, the Sunflower plants would create a new network of power transmission lines. These lines are the network wind farms need to tie into the power grids and make their projects work.

California has the most wind power generation in the country. That state began using wind power years ago, and a national report showed that in 2004 it generated about 1.5 percent of the total power used in the state. California expects to be able to provide about 25 percent of the state's total by 2025.

For Kansas, the fight is to push politics aside and do what is right for the entire state. State officials need to make sure new power plants comply with all federal and state regulations, but the Holcomb developers are committed to producing the cleanest power possible.

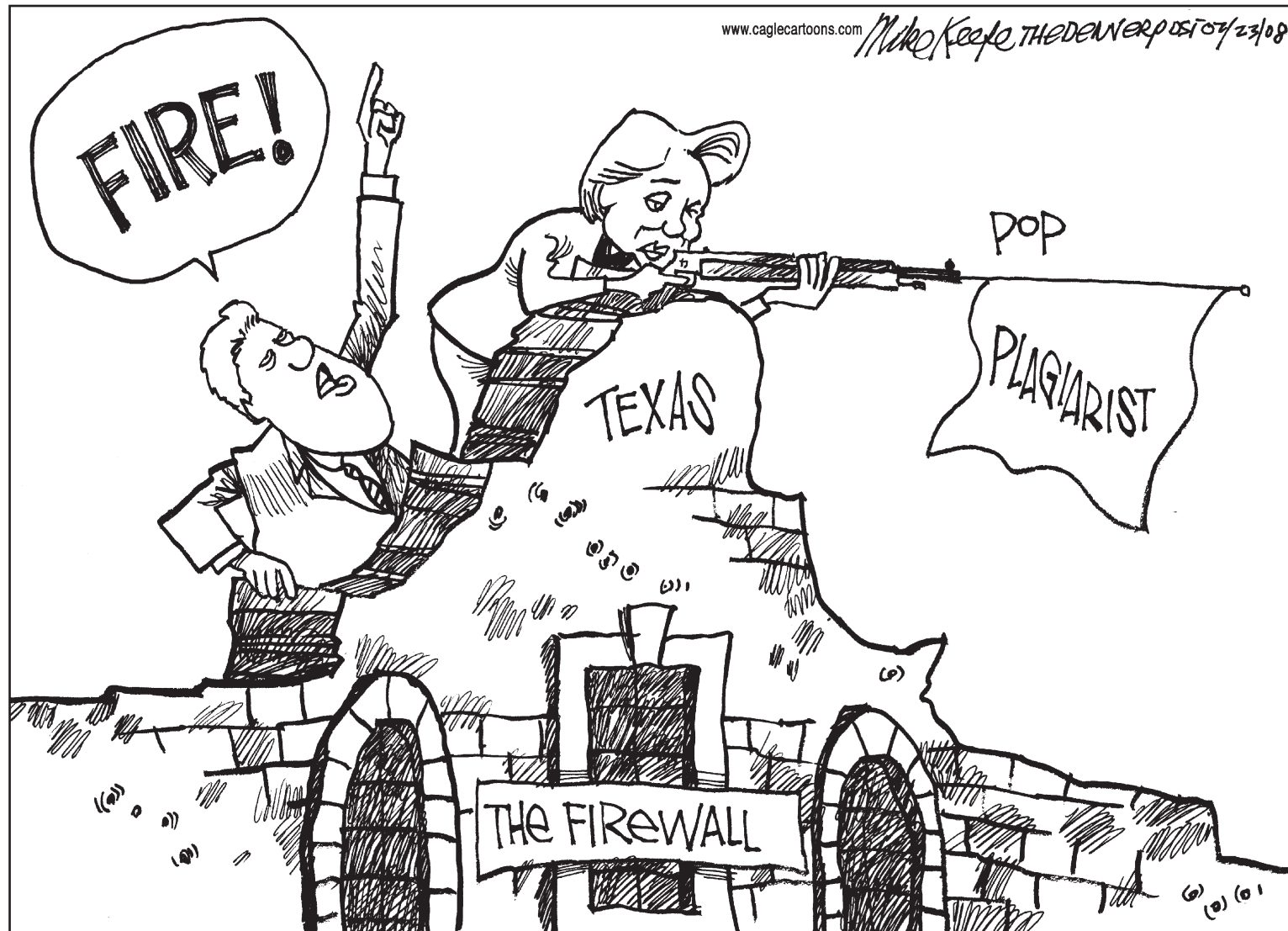
Re. Jim Morrison and Sen. Ralph Ostmeier were in Goodland on Saturday and the power plants were one of the main topics when they met with citizens.

Morrison said a bill allowing the plants to be built will be sent to the governor once the two houses agree on a compromise. This is a battle that western Kansas has to win. He said there is more than the power plants at stake.

Ostmeier said the bill passed the Senate with enough votes to override an expected veto by Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, but the House was a few votes short of that level.

Development of wind power and other alternatives is important, but there is no way in the next 12 years these can be built fast enough to handle our power needs. Now the state is reviewing permits for all the coal-fired power plants in the Kansas, and questions are being asked if these older plants — mostly in the eastern part of the state — will be required to clean up their emissions.

The crossroad is in front of us. The people and the elected officials need to take the road that provides the best of both wind power and cleaner energy. — Tom Betz



Sports Illustrated gets semi-naked

You've got to give the Sports Illustrated people points for being honest.

It's February, you see. In many parts of the country, it's bitter cold. The Super Bowl is over and baseball is yet to begin. We men don't know what to do with ourselves.

Our minds unoccupied, we lack direction. We dwell randomly on negative things -- our post-holiday flabbiness, old girlfriends who didn't work out and, for some, girlfriends who did.

But one thing -- the smile of a beautiful, scantily clad woman -- can make us forget our woes. SI has been helping us forget since it published its first swimsuit issue 44 years ago.

But this year it hit the mother lode. The cover features Marisa Miller, a 29-year-old stunner who cut her teeth modeling for Victoria's Secret. As her curviness spills off the page, she gazes at us with angelic calm. She makes us feel like everything is going to be all right.

And maybe it is going to be all right. Surely you know the origin of the swimsuit issue. The editors came up with the idea to boost magazine sales during the dead of winter.

It's been driving feminists batty from the start. They say it exploits women, and it does. They say it is wrong for men to view women as mere objects, and it is. But what angers them most is that the cover models often go on to fame and fortune just because they are gorgeous.

Then they marry a multimillionaire, eventually divorce him, and live happily ever after on a considerable pile of dough.



tom purcell

• commentary

The evolution of the swimsuit issue is also worth noting. The early issues were simple and mild. But in the late 1970s -- thank you, Cheryl Tiegs -- things really started heating up. The swimsuits got scantier and the models more beautiful.

That trend continued until the late 1990s, when something went terribly wrong. The 1998 issue, for instance, featured bony women with frowns on their faces. It had more feature stories than photos -- such as interviews with beautiful female meteorologists who were covered up with more clothing than a winter mannequin at Macy's.

But in the past few years, Sports Illustrated has been getting back to the basics. This year's issue can be summed up in two words: yow-sa!

It features 19 of the world's most glamorous supermodels pictured, says the press release, "in visually dynamic photo spreads, all set in unique and exotic locations from around the world."

It features many body-painting photos -- the fine art of painting swimsuits right onto the models' skin. I tried getting a job like that once, but couldn't afford the \$1000 a week they wanted me to pay.

There is a feature on Russian-born beauties for the simple reason that no magazine ever in

the history of mankind ever went wrong featuring Russian-born beauties in scanty duds.

The Sports Illustrated people spent 10 days with supermodel Bar Refaeli in her native Israel. She's stunning and not wearing very much. I'm sure that feature will endure us even more with our pals in Iran.

Another feature depicts NFL cheerleaders wearing even less than we usually see them not wearing.

And let's not forget race-car driver Danica Patrick. NASCAR fans will sum up her dark-eyed beauty in three words: yow-ow-sa!

In any event, you got to hand it to Sports Illustrated for being honest -- for getting back to the basics.

In an odd way, in a nutty culture like ours, the swimsuit issue is a good sign. SI is admitting that the swimsuit issue is a disgustingly honest cultural icon -- that its purpose is to objectify women because boorish men will pay good money to ogle them.

They're admitting that gorgeous women have always exploited beauty for bucks -- that they've always used it to part men from their dough. And rest assured: if the swimsuit issue is about anything, it's about generating dough.

In these confusing times, in which we pretend men and women are the same, there's something refreshingly primitive about that.

Still, things are confusing. Did you know more women buy the annual swimsuit issue than men? Must be the Will Ferrell photos.

Tom Purcell is a nationally syndicated humor columnist. For comments to Tom, please email him at Purcell@caglecartoons.com.

The Goodland Star-News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

Member: Kansas Press Association

Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association

National Newspaper Association

e-mail: star-news@nwkansas.com

Steve Haynes, President

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nwkansas.com

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services

(ntbetz@nwkansas.com)

Evan Barnum, Systems Admin.(support@nwkansas.com)

Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day, July 4th and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Star-News, 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: star-news@nwkansas.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: goodlandads@nwkansas.com

The Goodland Star-News assumes no liability for mistakes or omissions in advertising or failure to publish beyond the actual cost of the ad.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$29; six months, \$46; 12 months, \$81. Out of area, weekly mailing of two issues: three months, \$39; six months, \$54; 12 months, \$89 (All tax included). Mailed individually each day: (call for a price).

Incorporating:

The Goodland Daily News

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The Sherman County Herald

Founded by Thomas McCants

1935-1989

THE SHERMAN COUNTY STAR

Founded by Eric and Roxie Yonkey

1994-2001

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Woman wants consumer-driven health care

Money magazine has dubbed Regina Herzlinger the "Godmother" of consumer-driven health care, and it's not just because she has written books with titles like "Consumer-Driven Health Care: Implications for Providers, Payers and Policymakers."

The first woman to be "tenured and chaired" at Harvard Business School, Professor Herzlinger is known for her innovative research into health care. Her latest book is last year's "Who Killed Health Care?" It outlines her plan for creating a consumer-driven system that would deliver affordable, high-quality care to everyone by putting insurance money in the hands of patients, removing the third-party middleman in the doctor-patient relationship and giving employers cost relief.

I talked to Herzlinger on Feb. 13, by phone from her office in Cambridge, Mass.:

Q: Who are the bad guys who are wrecking or ruining or distorting our health-care system?

A: Well, essentially the problem is that you and I have taken part of our salaries and given them to our employers to use in buying health insurance on our behalf. There is no way they could buy our clothes or our homes or anything else as well as we can — and they don't do a very good job of buying health insurance, either. The only reason we've done that is because they can use our salaries pre-tax to buy health insurance ... The same problem — i.e., a third party buying on our behalf — also holds for Medicare, where the purchasing is done by the U.S. government, and for Medicaid, where the purchasing is done by state and local governments. So the biggest problem with our health-care system is that the agents we have appointed to take care of health insurance and health care — which are the government and businesses — are not very good at it.

Q: If we had a consumer-driven system of health care, what would it look like?

A: Everybody would be required to buy health insurance. If you were poor, you wouldn't be stuffed into Medicaid, which is not a great program because lots of doctors refuse to see



bill steigerwald

• newsmakers

Medicaid patients because they get paid so badly for them. Instead, you would be given money to go out and shop for health insurance just like everybody else. Eventually, people on Medicare would be cast out and they could buy what they wanted. That's what a consumer-driven system would look like — in other words, you and I would be buying the health insurance.

The second crucial attribute of this system is in order to make sure that we weren't buying stupid, we would need a lot of information, not only about the quality of our health insurers but also about the quality of the health-care providers that they provide access to. I need open-heart surgery? How good is this doctor in that hospital versus another doctor in some other kind of hospital? That's what we need.

Q: What or who is the chief obstacle to our developing a better system?

A: One is this tax preference, where only your employer can use pre-tax money to buy health insurance. ... The problem that is much more difficult to correct is the problem of transparency, and that is that providers do not want to be measured and they are hugely powerful. But unless we know whether we are buying a Toyota or an Edsel, we're never going to get to a higher-quality, lower-cost health-care system. And the only way you and I can know that, because we are not doctors and we are not scientists, is if we had good data that was accessible to us.

Q: What do you think of Hillary Clinton's health-care plan?

A: Well, I like the universal coverage and she does have choice, so allegedly under her plan you could choose to either buy a private health insurance or a public insurance. That's the rub. The public choice that she would offer is hugely subsidized. For instance, she would

offer Medicare for people like us. Well, Medicare — ha — for every eight dollars spent, seven dollars are paid by somebody other than the recipient. So if we were offered Medicare, which is hugely subsidized, of course we would opt for it. But we would put a tremendous burden on our children and grandchildren, and we would enlarge the government's stranglehold on the health-care system. Government is not good for health care. Government is political.

Government is bureaucratic. Government kills off innovation. Not a good idea. Her plans for controlling costs are equally bureaucratic. It is that the government would tell doctors how to practice medicine better. Already, physicians in their 50s and 60s can't wait to leave the profession.

Q: Does any politician have a better plan than Mrs. Clinton?

A: I think McCain has a pretty good plan. He's very high on transparency. None of the other candidates really push transparency because the special interests are so powerful and they don't want it. McCain has the courage to say, "I'm going to make data available about how good your doctors and hospitals are," so in that way it's better.

Q: Are you optimistic or pessimistic that our political leaders have the wisdom to take their paws off health care and allow a free market or a semblance of one to develop?

A: No. If the Democrats get elected, absolutely not. And what I now see, they are all about more government funding, more government control. I teach at the Harvard Business School. In a class of 100 students, I have 20 fully trained doctors. I say, "What the heck are you doing here? Why aren't you practicing medicine?" They say, "I cannot practice medicine any more." That's a tragedy that will become worse under a Democratic administration.

Bill Steigerwald is a columnist at the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review. E-mail Bill at steigerwald@caglecartoons.com.