

from our viewpoint...

Time to quit playing with state's future

Isn't it about time to stop playing politics with our future? Gov. Kathleen Sebelius is holding up construction of two relatively clean coal-fired power plants in western Kansas to support her political ambitions while 18 old, dirty plants spew pollution into the air in eastern Kansas.

A couple of power plants may not seem like much to eastern Kansas, where jobs are plentiful and growth is the norm. Out here, 200 jobs is major economic development.

No one says these plants should be allowed to degrade the air. Proponents say the plants are as clean as you can get, but if they need to be cleaned up some more, by all means, let's do it.

Since the state has no standards for carbon dioxide emissions, though, it's hard to meet them. That's what the governor and her minion, Secretary of Health and Environment Rob Bremby, seem to expect.

Sunflower Electric Power Corp. of Hays, a "generation and transmission" co-operative owned by rural electric co-ops out west, hopes to build the plants to supply it's farmer and municipal customers, and similar cooperatives in Colorado and the Texas panhandle.

The plants would be state of the art, much cleaner than any operating in Kansas. The administration has laid down a challenge here, saying the state essentially won't allow them to be built because they would produce a lot of carbon dioxide.

Even an experimental plan to grow algae to soak up the carbon hasn't bought the plants any credibility. Opponents claim the scheme won't work, though they all believe in the magic of wind power.

What we know is that the rural electrics do need the power, and rural customers across five states the plants would serve likely will pay a lot more for out-of-area power if they are not built.

A reasonable position on the plants would not fit well with the governor's higher political ambitions, though. She's running hard right now for vice president, no matter how modest she makes out to be.

People are starting to see her as a rising star, and that star is firmly hitched to Barack Obama's coattails. It's pretty obvious the reward for supporting Sen. Hillary Clinton could be no higher than a cabinet post, but with the Illinois senator, No. 2 does not seem unreasonable.

Out on the Plains, though, people will be paying higher electric rates to finance this ambition. It's a shame.

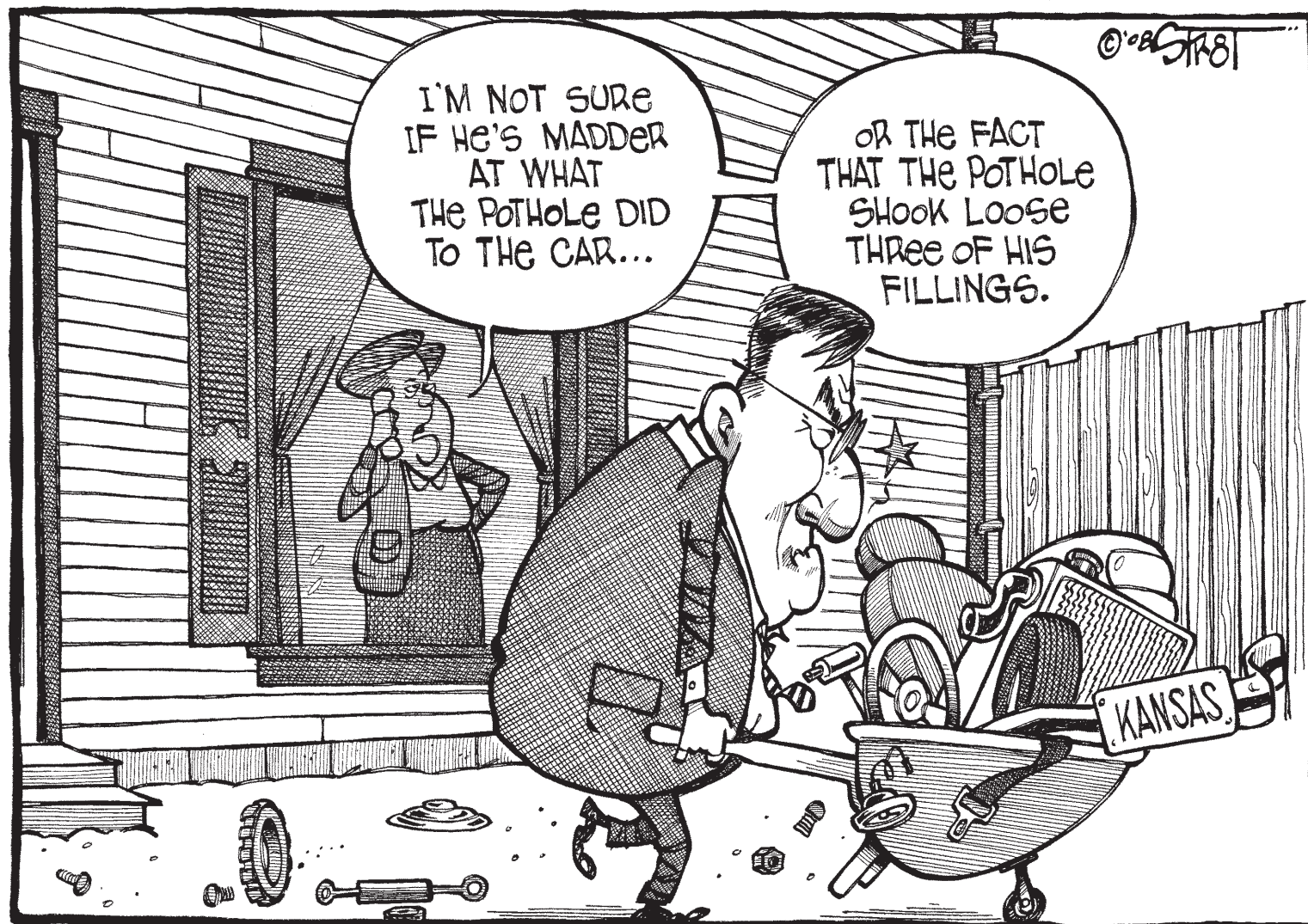
What Kansas needs is the jobs and power the plants would produce. What the governor needs is environmental credibility.

The issue is complex. The threat of global warming may be real, but there's really no alternative today to coal plants. Wind power is undependable at best, and solar needs years of research.

Developed eastern Kansas may not understand this, any better than the Front Range understands the needs of rural Colorado. It's unlikely the plants will produce any more pollution than the General Motors plant in Kansas City, or the cars it produces.

Some argue that the power will go mostly to other states, but so do the cars. The jobs belong here in either case, and we doubt Wyandotte County wants to give them up to save the earth.

A reasonable compromise would see the plants built with strict regulation, but it'll surprise us if that happens. Not until after the elections, anyway. — Steve Haynes



Big snakes could rival alligator in sewers

The snakes are coming, the snakes are coming.

According to a USA Today report, giant Burmese pythons could colonize the bottom one-third of the U.S.

While these monster snakes aren't expected to get into Kansas unless global warming gets a whole lot worse, I predict this will be as big a problem as the alligators in the sewers.

Apparently, the pythons — which are native to Asia and can grow up to 20 feet and 250 pounds — have been brought into this country as pets.

The first ones in the wild were discovered in the Florida Everglades in the mid-1990s, probably dumped by their owners after the pet snake ate the family poodle.

By 2003, evidence was found that the snakes had established breeding colonies and Florida began regulating their sale and ownership — talk about closing the barn door after the snake has already slithered out.

Burmese pythons are not poisonous but grab their prey with their powerful jaws and then squeeze it to death before swallowing the animal whole.

The pythons are not considered hazardous



cynthia haynes

• open season

to humans and the only known attacks on humans have come when the animals have been mishandled or misfed.

However, they eat just about everything else that comes their way.

In Florida, the USA Today article said, they eat bobcats, deer, alligators, raccoons, cats, rats, rabbits, muskrats, possum, mice, ducks, egrets, herons and song birds. They are believed to be a danger to both dogs and deer.

The state is worried that the snakes will eat all the alligators. Now that's a scary thought.

I can't see Kansas drivers being too broken up because there are a couple fewer deer in their headlights. However, any snake that will take on a bobcat or an alligator would definitely not be welcome in my back yard, thank you.

I like snakes and find the big constrictors fascinating. However, the city doesn't allow them as pets and I have a strong feeling that

three cats and a large snake would not be a good combination. I've had enough trouble over the last 14 or 15 years with cats that disappeared — probably down the gullets of wandering coyotes — even though we live in the middle of town.

While I really don't need more things out there that enjoy cat snacks, it would be fun to be able to stop along the road in the springtime and pick up toads, frogs, box turtles and pythons.

So, while these large reptiles aren't expected to slither into Kansas any time soon, they are projected to be in Georgia within the next few years.

Since my eldest daughter lives in Georgia and is a dog and cat owner, I warned her about the problem.

The cats always stay indoors, she said, and she didn't think the dogs were in too much danger. Khan, a large male rottweiler, is feisty as can be. Bushy is a more laid-back labrador, but he's pushing 250 pounds.

"Any snake that tries to eat Bushy will choke," she said.

Well, that would be one solution to the problem.

Leading symbol of conservatism dies

William F. Buckley Jr., the leading political and cultural symbol of American conservatism for almost 50 years, died Feb. 27 at age 82 at his home in Stamford, Conn. He had been ill with emphysema.

Buckley, who I spoke with by telephone on Nov. 14, 2007, is universally credited with godfathering the ideological revolution that carried Ronald Reagan into the White House in 1980. Author, lecturer, debater and host of "Firing Line" on PBS from 1966 to 1999, Buckley founded National Review magazine in 1955 and turned it into the country's leading conservative journal of opinion.

He retired as its active editor in 1990. But his syndicated newspaper column, "On the Right," which he began in 1962, continues to appear twice a week and he has written 10 novels featuring CIA agent Blackford Oakes. Despite his poor health, during our 15 minute talk about the state of conservatism, the 1991 Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient was erudite, gracious and cheerful.

Q: What's become of the conservative revolution that you fathered 50-some years ago?

A: Well, all revolutions have to either keep moving or else be consolidated. Ours is a little bit of each. I think that there is less appetite now, or patience, for revolutionary dogmas of the kind that all Europe and America faced right after the world war. That is an aspect of a revolution that has been consummated. It doesn't mean that it mightn't reawaken but, in fact, it has not yet. So we can say that's what happened to that revolution — we won.

Q: Do you feel today that that revolution peaked with Ronald Reagan?

A: Yes, I think it did. Viewed as a straight political trajectory, that, in my judgment, would be correct: It peaked in 1980.

Q: Can you give us a concise definition of conservatism?

A: Conservatism aims to maintain in working order the loyalties of the community to perceived truths and also to those truths which in their judgment have earned universal recognition.

Now this leaves room, of course, for deposition, and there is deposition — the Civil War being the most monstrous account. But it also urges a kind of loyalty that breeds a devotion to those ideals sufficient to surmount the current crisis. When the Soviet Union challenged America and our set of loyalties, it did so at gunpoint. It became necessary at a certain point



bill steigerwald

• newsmakers

to show them our clenched fist and advise them we were not going to deal lightly with our primal commitment to preserve those loyalties.

That's the most general definition of conservatism.

Q: When you look at the current state of conservatism, do you see the sun rising or the sun setting?

A: We've accomplished an enormous amount historically in the last 50 years. We emerged from the Second World War gravely threatened at many levels; threatened by a kind of an attitudinal socialism, which I think we have fought through successfully; and of course by huge, direct political talent — and a lot of tributary talent, as in Europe and so on and so forth — over these (threats) we have prevailed.

There is no Soviet threat. There is no tidal demand for a change in government of a kind that would ignore human rights and private property rights. A lot of problems continue — education primary among them, the allocation of resources. But the fact of the matter is that what we have accomplished is signal, important and enduring and under those circumstances, conservatives can legitimately take some pride in what has happened.

Q: The prefix "neo" being placed in front of the word "conservative" has given conservatism quite a different spin. Many old-time or traditional conservatives are not too happy with the idea that the United States is trying to spread democracy around the world a la Woodrow Wilson, as is going on in Iraq. Is that something conservatives can be blamed for or is that something that is not conservative in nature?

A: I think it's the latter. Conservatives can be blamed to the extent they are thought of having acquiesced in that definition of their goal in a free society. But it has been by no means unanimous in the belief that conservatism consists in that kind of evangelistic extreme.

There are people whom I enormously admire, as perhaps you do, who take a pretty Wilsonian view about the responsibility of states like ours vis-a-vis states that simply

reject learning that we consider to be primary, that's true.

But I don't think the existence of the neoconservative movement has the effect of vitiating legitimate conservatism — or even of putting such pressure on traditional conservatives as to feel that they are missing a great historical tide.

Some people that I very much respect, like (Weekly Standard editor) Bill Kristol, disagree with me on that, but there we are.

Q: You've always had a visible libertarian streak ...

A: Yes.

Q: ... whether it goes back to your admiration of Nock or your opposition to the war on drugs. Yet you and libertarians have always been feuding. Is there a simple way to summarize the most important argument between you and libertarians?

A: I suppose the most important argument is the dogmatic character of libertarian conservatism.

I once wrote an essay on the subject in which I said that if I were at sea on my boat and saw a light flashing I would not worry deeply whether the financing of that light had been done by the private or public sector. This became a kind of playful debate with the (University of) Chicago (economists). By and large it has to do with the tenacity with which some libertarians tend to hold on to their basic (principles).

Q: Is conservatism compatible with a welfare-warfare state that consumes so much of our national wealth and controls so much of our daily lives?

A: It's incompatible with a state that overdoes it. If the demands on the state required a devotion and a preoccupation with it to the point of standing in the way of people's devising their own preferences and their own order of preferences, then you could say it was a mortal enemy.

I don't think it's fair to say that given the percentage of the national income that's being pre-empted by the state at this time that we have lost that war. But I think it is correct to say that it's a war we need to continue to fight and concern ourselves with.

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