

from our viewpoint...

## Energy debate centers on drilling

Gas prices have eased a bit this week, dipping to \$3.62 here and even lower in eastern Kansas, where they are down to the \$3.50 level, but the price remains higher than many feel it should.

A central debate in the past few weeks has been a lifting of the ban on offshore oil drilling by President George Bush, who called on the Democrats in Congress to lift their ban on the basis this would encourage more oil exploration and help lower the gas prices by reducing our dependence on foreign oil.

Ironically, it was Bush's father who signed an executive order in 1990 to ban coastal oil exploration, and President Bill Clinton extended the ban until 2012.

Much of the discussion has been about allowing oil exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve in Alaska and expanding exploration in the Gulf of Mexico.

Both presidential candidates, Republican John McCain and Democrat Barack Obama, have taken positions on the question.

If the price at the pump continues to fall, as some analysts predict, the pressure may lessen, but it will remain an economic issue through the campaign.

An example of how public sentiment changes as prices go up can be found in California, where the Public Policy Institute of California's latest survey showed a change of heart, with 51 percent in favor of more drilling. This was the first time since the question was first asked five years ago that a majority of Californians have favored drilling, while 45 percent oppose drilling.

The Republicans are pushing the issue as a way to embarrass House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who is from California. They'd like to claim that her refusal to allow a vote on the offshore drilling question makes the Democrats responsible for the higher gas prices.

The truth is, as in most debates, both sides have their points. Researchers believe great untapped oil reserves can be found off the outer continental shelf, both along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, plus the western Gulf of Mexico. This would be billions of barrels, enough to reduce the amount of foreign oil to some degree. The problem is the amount of time and money it will take to develop these areas.

Environmentalists, who are being described as extremists, believe the oil companies have not explored all the offshore areas where drilling is allowed. The National Resources Defense Council says even if the ban were lifted today, it would be at least 10 years before any new oil would reach the American public.

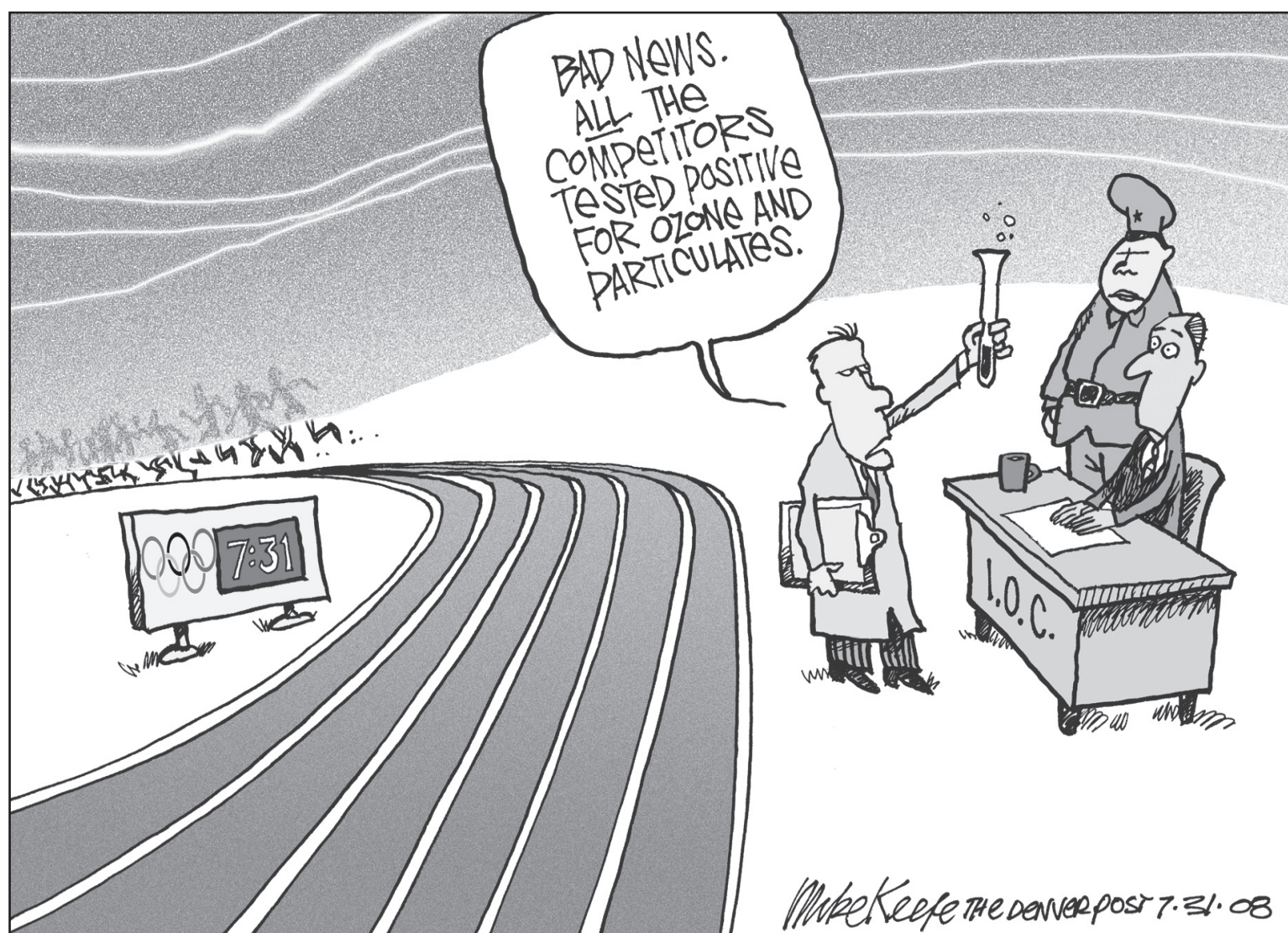
The main question is whether it is worth the risk to explore in the offshore areas. The survey in California appears to show the American public can be persuaded by economics to change its position and favor taking the risk.

People who live in Alaska remember the Exxon Valdez spill in 1989, and the people of Santa Barbara, Calif., remember the black sludge that covered 35 miles of coastline in 1969 from an drilling rig blowout.

Drilling proponents say the technology and safety measures since these disasters has reduced the risk, and that offshore drilling is the safest way to increase America's independence.

The offshore question seems a long way away from our state, but the recent debates over coal-fired power plants and the determination of Gov. Kathleen Sebelius to push for more wind power makes the issues relevant.

In a debate, a judge or panel of judges have to decide who wins. In the energy debate, it will be up to the voters in November. — Tom Betz



## Buying organic has unseen consequences

"Well, I guess we're not going to eat that," Cynthia said, picking something out of her oatmeal.

This should be interesting, I thought. I leaned over, and she was picking a small winged bug out of the granola she'd just sprinkled onto her cereal.

"Well," I said, "that has been in the cupboard a while."

"We don't eat very much oatmeal," she said. "Still, ..."

I should explain, Cynthia likes to make from-scratch oatmeal when we both happen to be at breakfast at the same time. With our schedules, that's not often.

Because it takes longer than toasting a bagel or buttering toast, neither one of us is liable to cook oatmeal for one, and the instant stuff is just awful.

We both like oatmeal with milk, fruit, Splenda brown sugar and a sprinkle of crunchy granola.

That's where the little critter slipped in. Cynthia buys fresh, organic granola, the kind that comes in little bags tied up with ribbon. No preservatives, no chemicals.

After the cute little bag is opened, we store it in a tightly-sealed plastic container. It usually keeps until we eat it all. Until this time.

But I guess that's one of the dangers of buy-



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ing organic. No preservatives, no insecticides. Insect eggs are organic, after all.

I looked again. She was oh-so-carefully picking out the granola, along with any oatmeal it had touched. She glared at me.

"You don't have to tell the girls about this," she said, darkly. "Or anybody else."

"Oh," I said, smiling sweetly, "I won't tell them."

Hey, she's not the only one who's had trouble with organic food. I had to throw out a perfectly good box of stoned-wheat crackers the other day. Two boxes, in fact.

They looked good when I bought them. I'd tried the brand before. They were tasty with cheese.

But this box, I'd bought, put on the shelf and sort of forgotten about. Never opened in six-nine months. That's nothing at all for normal crackers.

I tried one.

Ugh. The fat had gone rancid.

I put them back. Tried one the next day. Just

as nasty.

No bugs there, though. Just bad crackers. I tossed the whole box, sadly, because I really like stoned wheat thins.

The next day, I noticed several packages of the same crackers Cynthia had brought home from a hotel that left them as a peace offering. That was a couple of years ago.

"Uh oh," I thought.

I tasted one, carefully.

Just as bad as the ones I'd bought.

"OK," I thought, maybe preservatives have their advantages. Still, no one has to go out of their way to get their recommended daily allowance of partly hydrogenated soybean oil with TBHQ for freshness. TBHQ? That's tertiary butylhydroquinone, highly tasty. May cause cancer in rats. Stabilized the oil in commercial crackers.

I bought some more stoned wheat thins the other day. I promised myself I'd eat them this month. Maybe I can take them with me to the doghouse.

For while Cynthia did make me promise not to tell the bug-granola story, she didn't say anything about writing a column.

If you want to try the crackers — they're really good with cheese — just stop by. I'll be around back of the house.

## Polls: Obama makes Americans nervous

On the night of Jan. 20, 2009, a new commander-in-chief will leave the inaugural podium, parade, and festivities for the Oval Office. A national security staff ready with the latest "threat briefing" will join him there. On his desk, they will place a thick binder of reports, each focusing on real or emerging threats to our national security. In the quiet of the Oval Office — in the presence of these stern-faced, deadly serious briefers and advisers — Barack H. Obama, should he be the next president, will come face-to-face with reality.

Americans are afraid of this scenario, Barack H. Obama as commander-in-chief. The New York Times and CBS News released a poll this week; in it, Americans answered detailed questions about this possibility.

The poll's answers shocked the strategists at the Obama campaign headquarters in Chicago. An intensive international travel schedule for Obama and a refocus of the campaign's message on defense and foreign policy speaks to this fear.

The poll says Americans consider him lacking in the abilities necessary to run the armed services. Conversely, the polls show John McCain blows Obama out of the water as a good commander-in-chief. Forty-six percent of respondents thought McCain would very likely "be effective" as commander-in-chief, as opposed to only 24 percent saying the same of Obama. In fact, 36 percent think it is "not likely" Obama will be effective in the position.

Obama's talents lie in his gift of oratory and his ability to move people with emotion, but this does not necessarily make for a good commander. The chief executive's job requires forward thinking, realistic assessments of the world's threats, and the maturity to make judgments in a crisis.

The USS Gerald R. Ford, an aircraft carrier, is now under construction in Hampton Roads, Va. It will be ready to join the fleet in 2015, replacing a carrier launched 47 years ago. Do we know that the USS Ford will be needed in 2015?

No, we do not. But can we afford to bet against it?

Obama thinks so. According to his own campaign literature, he is willing to let the USS Ford, and many more of tomorrow's defense



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• commentary

technologies, rust at the pier.

The decision to build the aircraft carrier is based on the concept of preparing America for the next war to come. Commanders must anticipate the evil designs of irrational lunatics. It's always a tricky business, trying to anticipate future unknowns. Nevertheless, the president's oath is to protect and defend the United States.

A president who hasn't had any experience in military strategic planning is going to find himself in deep trouble if he finds his strategic armories empty in the face of an advancing enemy.

A review of Obama's national defense plans offers insight into his preparedness to meet today's and tomorrow's defense realities. Obama makes a variety of claims which we think would dramatically weaken America if enacted. The Obama plans include cutting tens of billions of dollars of the Defense Department budget, and the development of no new weapons in space to protect satellites and strategic assets. He plans cuts in missile defense systems, slowing our development of future combat systems, developing no new nuclear weapons, and negotiating with Russia to take our ICBMs off what he calls "hair-trigger alert." He advocates deep cuts in our nuclear program.

Not only does Obama have dangerous disarmament plans for America, he sorely lacks

in experience. Besides being a junior senator, he has not been on any of the major defense committees. He has no previous hands-on experience with the military nor has he spent time with the men and women of our armed forces.

There are hundreds of weapon systems that could, under the quick-to-cut hand of Obama, be eliminated before they had the chance to prove themselves. If Obama had been in charge when the M1A1 Abrams Main Battle Tank was under development (a huge financial problem for the military) he would have cut it. But its developers persisted, and dollars that might have been considered "waste" by Obama were spent until the M1A1 became the most lethal, most respected, most effective tank on the battlefield.

Ask any Abrams crewmember who has survived direct hits by explosive shells and rocket-propelled grenades if he would have cancelled the Abrams, and the answer will be a resounding "No!"

Obama's perfect future vision enables him to scrap defense programs, even as our nation's enemies prepare very nasty projectiles to hurtle across continents and oceans.

Will he be able to effectively deal with crazed terrorists and power-hungry leaders with nuclear weapons in hand? Recent polls show Americans are nervous about Obama as commander-in-chief, and rightly so.

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## The Goodland Star-News

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

Member: Kansas Press Association

Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association

National Newspaper Association

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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

1932-2003

### The Sherman County Herald

Founded by Thomas McCants

1935-1989

### THE SHERMAN COUNTY STAR

Founded by Eric and

Roxie Yonkey

1994-2001

### Nor'West Newspapers

Haynes Publishing Company

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