

from our viewpoint...

Little understanding in the energy debate

Energy has become the watchword of our political discussion, though there's little real understanding of what counts and — and what doesn't — in the energy debate.

Since most of us — political operatives included — know little about the economics and impacts of energy decisions, we tend to believe what we want to believe.

So the debate becomes a matter of faith, every bit as much as those over abortion or a balanced budget.

Today, the argument is over whether to renew our push for oil in offshore fields and in the Alaskan wilderness. No one has any figures on whether there's enough oil to make any impact on American consumption, but everyone has an opinion.

It's the same with proposals to build coal-fired power plants: Proponents argue that we need the power, that these plants would be cleaner than any yet built in the state. Opponents, most of whom only assume global warming is a threat, fear the added "carbon footprint."

How many on either side understand the carbon-dioxide equation?

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, hot to get to Washington one way or another, has staked much of her political capital on opposing coal plants and pushing wind power.

No one thinks wind power is bad, except those who don't want some of our most scenic landscape cluttered up with giant windmills, but is it really the answer to our needs?

Unless someone can figure out how to store massive amounts of electricity, it can't be, but the emotional arguments in favor of wind are unstoppable.

Are Big Oil companies ripping off the American public to pile up unconscionable profits?

The answer depends more on whether you see Big Oil as greedy corporations out to rape the land or as a few million retirees whose union (or state) pension plans happen to own a lot of oil stock, doesn't it?

True, corporate executives bring down huge salaries, especially when times are good, but stockholders seem to benefit the most. And who are they? Just average Americans with a pension or 401K plan. That's all.

Oddly enough, the same unions whose pensions benefit from high oil prices often back Democrats who decry the greed of Big Oil. Members don't make the connection, apparently, between oil profits and healthy pensions.

Then there are those who told us oil prices were never coming down. Demand will drive them ever higher, these doomsmayers cried.

The plunge in the last week gave that the lie. Now "experts" say oil might drop back to \$70 a barrel, with fuel prices following.

Is it all a plot to make us appreciate \$3-a-gallon gas?

Could be. If you believe in conspiracy theory.

It all comes back to belief. Belief that times are bad tends to make them so. Belief that what's happening at this instant will go on forever blinds us to the change around the bend.

Sometimes, especially in politics, when there's hay to be made, the underlying facts don't have much to do with it. Belief is enough.

And some days, belief is all we have. Few of us are equipped to investigate and understand economics or global markets. The one truth is that markets, left to their own devices, will solve their own problems. Politicians seldom solve anything.

But if you believe that, it's hard to believe most of the rest, isn't it? — *Steve Haynes*



Good catches fly-fishing in Colorado

Steve had some pretty good catches while fly-fishing in Colorado last week.

He caught about two dozen brook trout, numerous trees and himself.

The brookies were mostly catch and release, although we did get a nice couple of fish dinners out of them.

The bushes were all catch-and-release except the one that gave him back his fly rather quickly.

Which is how we come to the last thing he caught last week — his thumb.

I was busy getting supper ready on the next-to-the-last day of our Colorado vacation. Steve was fishing. He had left at 5:30 p.m. promising to be back by dark, which would be about 8 p.m. out there. However, just before 7, he appeared at the front door.

I was a little surprised, but the weather was a little unsettled and I figured he might have outrun a thunderstorm. The only other thing that gets him off the water early is an unexpected tumble into the creek. That moves him home really, really quickly.

"Catch anything," I asked.

"Oh, yes!," he smiled. "Four small ones



cynthia haynes

• open season

and this."

He held his right thumb up and there appeared to be a caterpillar or furry black-and-white-bug very firmly attached to the pad.

I looked the situation over. He looked the problem over and tried to wiggle the hook out again. No luck. He tried to push the barb back through the skin so we could cut it off, but that's tough skin there. We decided that, while the hook didn't hurt, he would have to have professional help to get it out.

A call to the town clinic revealed that the doctor worked from 9-5 and had left for the night.

A call to the nearest hospital — 45 miles away down the mountain roads — gave us the information that they had a doctor on call in the emergency room 24 hours a day.

Steve Haynes, come on down.

We discussed the expense of going to the emergency room versus possible complications of waiting until 9 in the morning for the local doctor. The ER won out.

But first Steve took a shower and we had supper. The doctor would be there all night, the barbed hook didn't hurt much — and we were hungry. Besides, we'd bought a steak for dinner. Steve went out to start the fire.

Down at the emergency, room the doctor numbed the thumb, then tried to push the barb out so he could cut it off. That's some tough skin there. Finally, he used a scalpel to remove the fly and returned it to Steve for his next fishing trip.

"There you go," he said. "The most expensive fly you'll buy all year. But it should do well, probably had lots of extra flavoring on it now."

Steve hopes to try that out later this month, when he'll get a chance to offer some trout a really expensive treat.

In the meantime, he left the emergency room with a Dora the Explorer bandage on his finger and a new appreciation for barbed hooks.

Big thank you to fair, carnival volunteers

To the Editor:

A big thank you to the carnival committee — Sherman County Community Services — the Northwest Kansas District Free Fair board, the Thunder on the Plains committee who organized the Professional Bull Rider Western Plains Chute-Out, and all the people involved with the 4-H shows.

Anyone who hasn't been out to the fair yet should go and see just what Goodland has to offer. We have rides and game booths sponsored by local businesses and many volunteers.

I encourage the people of Goodland to say "thank you" this week as you see members of the carnival board, including Brad Schick,



from our readers

• to the editor

Dean Graber, Chris Biel, Lynn Abbott, Dan Hayden, Jan and Clyde Lambertz, Dick Hayden, Cris Wilson, Melody Knudson, Matt Heiter, Colleen Smith, Curtis Duncan, Patrick Gleason, Doug Sederstrom, Brooke Lohr, Chester Ross, John Stroyek, Steve Duell and Brad Schields, spouses, and the many volunteers out at the fair.

Just a simple smile and thank you goes a long way. It all helps make our community strong and positive.

It takes the community to make great things happen. Thank you to the businesses and people who have donated money to the carnival and fair. It's looking really nice out there.

Thank you again for everyone who has done a little part in making the fair here in Goodland so fun to go to.

It's GOOD to be in Goodland; just stop and look!

Jessica Kannady
Goodland

Fannie, Freddie and the daybed

The whole mortgage mess reminds me of the daybed incident.

Maybe I better explain.

One day, my next-door neighbor arrived home with a daybed from Ikea. The one-piece bed was built of solid wood and covered in a fine upholstery.

Three neighbors and I offered to help him get it upstairs. As we hashed over strategies, the daybed owner became consumed with doubt.

"I don't think there's enough room to get it up the stairwell," he said.

"There's plenty of room!" we lied.

We were eager, as fellows often are — particularly since our stairwell and daybed weren't at risk — to see if we could accomplish an obviously impossible task.

We were soon shoving the bed through the narrow space, causing the wood frame beneath the upholstery to tear as it scraped the plaster.

"It won't fit," said the daybed owner. "I should return it."

"It's too late," said another neighbor. "We've torn the fabric. Ikea won't take it back now."

And so we resumed shoving the bed and scraping the plaster as we slowly ascended the stairs. As we attempted to navigate a 90-degree turn into the upstairs hallway, the daybed became impossibly wedged against the walls and ceiling.

"Let's knock a hole in the wall," said another neighbor, unable to conceal his enthusiasm.

"Knock a what?" said the daybed owner.

"A hole! It will provide clearance!"

The first hole provided clearance, too. We were so inspired that, three holes later, we were finally able to shove the daybed, by then mangled and badly damaged, into the hallway.



tom purcell

• commentary

Which brings us back to the mortgage crisis — and government intervention.

During the Depression years, as part of the New Deal, FDR created the Federal Housing Administration. The FHA established rigid guidelines to minimize risk (believe it or not, people used to need good credit and regular paychecks to get approved) and essentially took on the risk that lenders otherwise would have had to shoulder. Mortgage terms became much more affordable and middle-class folks were able to buy homes.

So far so good.

To pump liquidity into the mortgage marketplace, FDR also established Fannie Mae (Federal National Mortgage Association) and Freddie Mac (Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation); both have since become quasi-government organizations.

Here's how they work: After a lender originates a mortgage, Fannie or Freddie buy it, freeing up cash for the lender to issue other loans (they currently own nearly half of all mortgages in America). Fannie and Freddie then package the loans into bundles and sell them to investors.

So long as housing values continued to rise and people didn't default on their mortgages, everybody was happy — banks originated loans, Fannie and Freddie bought them and their invest-

tors were paid returns on their investments.

But housing values have fallen drastically in some regions and folks are defaulting on their mortgages — in part because of Fannie and Freddie.

You see, values have fallen drastically because they were inflated unnaturally. They were inflated unnaturally because anyone with a heartbeat could get a gimmicky loan.

Anyone could get a gimmicky loan because lenders knew Fannie and Freddie would purchase virtually any loan they originated — even the risky subprime loans.

Fannie and Freddie would purchase subprime loans because Congress persuaded them to — it's not fair to leave out folks with bad credit and job histories, after all.

And Fannie and Freddie were happy to do as Congress asked because everybody knew Congress — even though no laws mandated it — would bail them out if things went sour.

And now that things have gone sour — now that lax regulatory oversight let a woefully undercapitalized Fannie and Freddie run free — many politicians see only one solution: More government promises, subsidies and bailouts.

To wit: taxpayers must bail out fools who took on gimmicky loans they couldn't afford — and the bigger fools who gave them loans — because they, and our middle-headed Congress, got us in so deep there's no turning back now.

I sure hope our economy pulls through this mess better than the daybed did.

Tom Purcell. Tom is a nationally syndicated humor columnist. Visit Tom on the web at www.TomPurcell.com or e-mail 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

Tom Betz, Editor

Pat Schiefen, Society Editor

Sharon Corcoran, Reporter

Jordie Mann, Jessica Corbin, Advertising Depr.

Sheila Smith, Office Manager



Nor'west Press

Jim Bowker, General Manager

Richard Westfahl, Betty Morris, James Jackson

Lana Westfahl, James Ornelas, Tasha Shores

Barbara Ornelas, Elizabeth Brock, Judy McKnight

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
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