

from other pens...

Wind energy offers clean path to growth

The moment is approaching when our nation must decide how it's going to power the future. The importance of renewable energy becomes clear as Congress turns its attention to energy policy this fall, as we examine the importance of true energy independence and security more closely and as we continue our work on rebuilding the economy and job creation.

Experience has taught us investment in the renewable energy economy creates jobs across all employment sectors, including construction, engineering, operations, technology and professional services, in both rural and urban areas.

Greater use of renewable energy will allow the country to prolong its current power generation resources while developing new generation technologies to ensure a secure and homegrown supply of energy.

I've stated our citizens won't fully embrace emerging energy technologies until it's in their best economic interest to do so. As I meet with business leaders from around the world, they're increasingly drawn to powering their facilities with wind in an effort to align their business practices with company philosophy.

Others have been hesitant to embrace renewable energy sources such as wind power, citing a potential increase in cost compared to traditional sources. Many have forged ahead, confident the long-term benefits of renewable energy will outweigh the short-term costs.

Now, as power prices for new wind generation continue to deflate, many businesses are re-evaluating the economics. We, as a nation, have been waiting for the moment when a true balance between environmental concerns, economic benefits and energy needs is in view. I believe that moment has arrived.

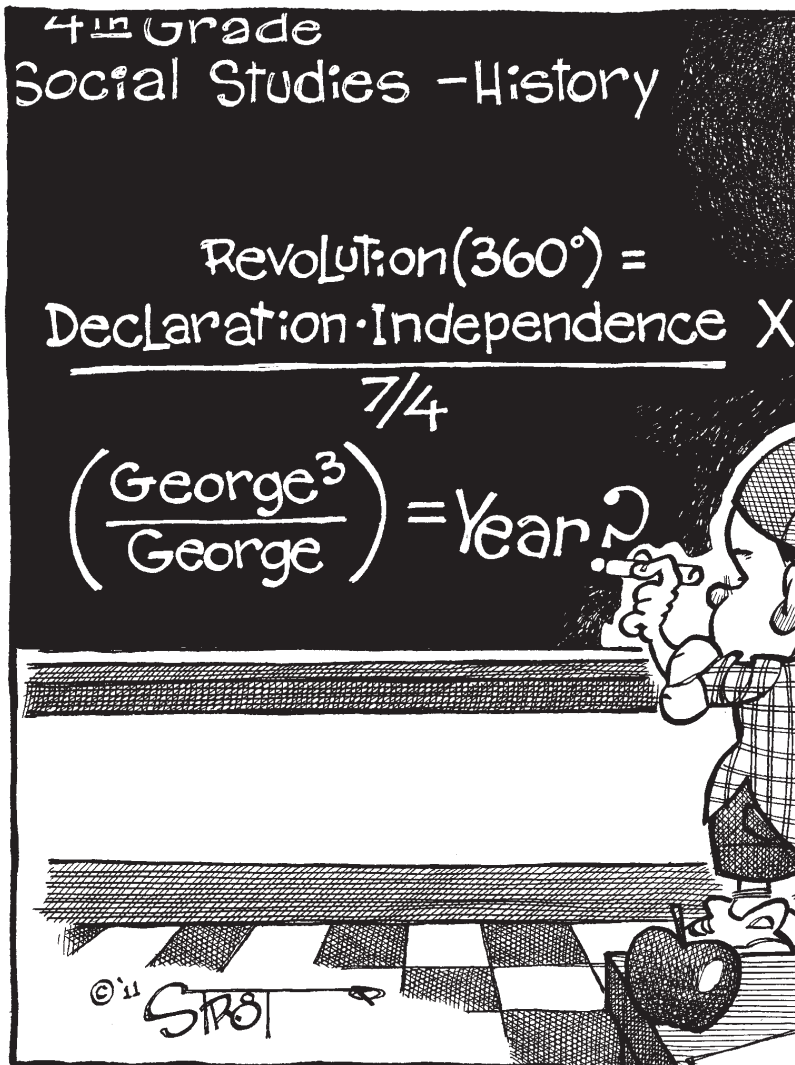
At the national level, we've moved toward this balance by deploying powerful tools, such as tax incentives to support investment in renewable energy projects and grants to encourage innovation in clean-coal technologies. The wind industry has utilized a production tax credit, which has helped the industry see steady growth this decade. I support the continued use of those tools as a way to spur investment in our communities and create sorely needed jobs.

In Kansas and the lower Midwest, our local utilities have designed and are constructing an electric transmission system that ensures greater reliability for our residents, offers access to competitively priced power and dramatically increases our ability to move renewable energy across the country.

Wind energy makes a compelling economic case, with new installed wind prices dropping from around \$0.06 per kilowatt hour to \$0.03 or lower, while turbine technology increases capacity factors by 50 percent or more. We've increased transmission capacity, constructing more than 1,000 new miles of high-voltage electric transmission.

Kansans have a proud history of meeting the needs of the world. We export wheat to feed the hungry and machines that can fly to make the world a smaller place. The time has come for us to export clean, reliable, and affordable wind energy to the nation. For states, utility companies, businesses and citizens, there will be no better time in the foreseeable future than the next few months to purchase wind power.

This article first appeared on Bloomberg Government. Gov. Sam Brownback is a former U.S. senator for Kansas and a former Republican candidate for president.



Remembering our trip on Sept. 11, 2001

They say everyone can remember where they were when President Kennedy was shot, just as everyone who lived through them can remember where they were when they learned about the bombing of Pearl Harbor, or the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Big events create big memories. I was born well after Pearl Harbor, after my daddy came home from the Navy, but I do remember Nov. 22, 1963.

I was in sophomore geometry class. Wood Blossom, a much beloved, crusty old teacher was lecturing us when the word came to the third floor of Emporia High School.

Television was coming of age in those days, and the nation remained glued to the sets as never before. School was called off and many stayed home from work. We were in shock as we watched the motorcade approach Dealey Plaza in Dallas over and over again.

Presidents have been shot both before and since, but never so publicly, so instantly, so well and thoroughly recorded. Never shared with the nation from start to finish, from the shooting itself to the shooting of Lee Harvey Oswald days later.

Sept. 11, 2001, dawned for us in a cornfield somewhere in Iowa. We were on Amtrak's California Zephyr, headed to Milwaukee for a newspaper convention. It would take us all day and the better part of the next day to get home.



steve haynes

• along the sappa

The railroads, unsure of what might happen next, stopped all trains. After tracks were checked, passenger trains were allowed to proceed to the next stop, which for us was Ottumwa, Iowa, where many went into the depot waiting room to watch the television. There we saw the horrors of the second plane, witnessed the collapse of the twin towers.

Unsure of what would happen next, people started looking for a way out of town. Rumor had it that the train could not go to Chicago because the depot tracks stood in the shadow of the Sears Tower, and who knew if it might not be next?

(As it turned out, we could have gotten to Chicago that night and perhaps to Milwaukee in the morning, but hardly anyone else got there. The trains did finish their runs, but airlines were grounded for three days. The association faced huge problems trying to refund people's money, and the few delegates who arrived early were trapped in Milwaukee for days.)

We rented a car that we had to return in Lincoln, Neb. From there, eventually, we caught

the westbound Zephyr, which got us back to our car in McCook only a little more than a day after we left. It was an expensive round trip, but compared to the attacks' impact on the rest of the country, only a minor inconvenience.

The next day, we went back to work, one eye on the news as the situation developed, the other on how the disaster was affecting our town and our neighbors.

Time has dimmed the details of what we learned when, but as in 1963, the memory remains strong: Images of Mayor Rudy Giuliani, firemen and police officers, the planes striking, the towers crumbling, anti-aircraft crews at the Pentagon, survivors and weeping relatives.

It's easy to see President Bush as he spoke to the nation. He put the blame on Osama bin Laden and al Qaida, declaring war on the terrorist. And he warned us that night, the fight would not be quick or easy.

When you think some of our troops are still in Afghanistan, those sent later still in Iraq, security ever tighter on airline flights and in major cities and ports, you begin to understand what he was talking about.

In the days and years since, it seems like we have gotten the upper hand, but terrorism is hard to deter and impossible to completely prevent. The war started that day continues, and it's likely to be going 10 years from now.

Let's hope there are no more memorable days to recall by then.

Keystone XL pipeline: A bad idea

Families across the middle swath of our country – from North Dakota to Louisiana – have a disturbing question to ask themselves: "Do we want a leaky pipeline pumping 800,000 barrels of oil a day running through our community?"

The proposed Keystone XL oil pipeline, which would transport tar sands – a mixture of sand, clay, water and a dense tar-like form of petroleum, from the Boreal forests of Alberta to refineries in the Gulf of Mexico region – is a 1,700-mile time bomb that either will be activated or defused in the coming days.

The pipeline would travel directly across the Ogallala Aquifer, the largest underground aquifer in North America, which provides drinking water and irrigation for much of the Plains region. The thick raw "bitumen" tar sands are mixed with a volatile natural gas, making a highly corrosive, acidic and unstable combination – not something you'd want flowing in enormous quantities anywhere near where you sit down for dinner with your family.

The fact the predecessor pipeline and its pumping stations have leaked a dozen times this past year should be enough to make anyone question the intelligence of this scheme. Can farmers, families, cities and ecosystems really afford an on-land spill similar to the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico?

But this problem should worry us all. The



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threat to immediate public health is compounded by the threat the tar sands pose to our planet's atmosphere. Bizarre weather patterns are playing out the climate change crisis – Irene, record floods and droughts around the world, freak tornados and wildfires. The atmosphere is changing, and the accelerating use of fossil fuels is a major driver.

The tar sands represent the second-largest pool of carbon on the planet, second only to the oil remaining under the desert of Saudi Arabia. If we actually go through with clear-cutting enormous tracts of Boreal forests, processing the thick tar with steam and water, mixing it with natural gas and transporting, refining and burning it, it would take the concentration of carbon in the atmosphere from nearly 400 parts per million to 600 parts per million, something leading scientists have been sounding the alarm about for years.

As James Hansen, NASA's top climatologist, put it, if we have any chance of getting back to a stable climate, "unconventional fossil fuels, such as tar sands, must be left in the ground."

In other words, "If the tar sands are thrown into the mix, it is essentially game over."

The project developers want us to believe we need these tar sands – that there is no alternative. They want us to forget the solar industry employs more Americans than U.S. steel production, and that entrepreneurs nationwide, like myself and my team at Solar Mosaic, are finding creative ways to help communities prosper through clean energy.

Because of their belief in better alternatives to our energy needs, 1,200 people have been arrested these past few weeks while peacefully protesting in front of the White House. These are people of every generation – religious leaders, union workers and business people. Actors Danny Glover and Darryl Hannah joined what has become the largest environmental civil disobedience in a generation.

The two individuals with exclusive power to stop construction of the pipeline are Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. Because the pipeline would cross the border, the secretary of state and, ultimately, the president must sign a certificate of "national interest" for the development to begin.

If jobs are the president's big concern, let's not set the planet on fire for what the State Department estimates would be only 5,000-6,000 jobs. With even a modest carbon fee, the president could raise enough money to support an Apollo-style program to rebuild America's lagging infrastructure and really catalyze transition to a clean-energy economy.

Even if we can't protest in front of the White House, we can step up and speak out.

Our water, our health, our environment and the natural beauty of a 1,700-mile swath of America need you.

The author is Billy Parish, president of Solar Mosaic, a solar energy marketplace, and author of the forthcoming book, "Making Good: Finding Meaning, Money and Community in a Changing World." He can be reached at (203) 887-7225 (in Flagstaff, Ariz.).

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