Debate over KS coal plants

BY JOHN HANNA
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LAWRENCE — Timothy Carr delivered his message with a matter-of-fact tone: The world is going to consume more energy; little of the electricity it will need will come from renewable resources, and much of that power will come from coal.

Carr, a senior Kansas Geological Survey scientist, spoke last week at a University of Kansas conference. His remarks came a day before former Vice President Al Gore received a Nobel Prize for his campaign on global warming and a day after environmentalists had denounced Sunflower Electric Power Corp.'s plan for two coal-fired power plants in southwest Kansas.

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"Shoot the messenger," he said.

Sunflower's $3.6 billion proposal has put it at the center of a debate over carbon dioxide emissions and global warming. But another question is part of the discussion: whether Kansas needs as much capacity to generate electricity as Sunflower plans to build.

"When you combine the benefits of both conservation and wind and look at the current coal plants and nuclear plant that we have, my view is that there is a very limited need for additional coal plants in the future," Lt. Gov. Mark Parkinson, co-chairman of an energy policy council, said during a recent interview.

Sunflower is seeking an air-quality permit from the Department of Health and Environment, and Secretary Rod Bremby has said he will decide whether to grant it by the end of this month.

Environmentalists want Bremby to reject the permit over the plants' CO2 emissions, even though the state doesn't regulate the greenhouse gas, which most scientists see as a major contributor to global warming. Many legislators, including Senate President Steve Morris and House Speaker Melvin Neufeld, are pressuring him to approve a permit, seeing the project as vital economic development.

The project would add two, 700-megawatt plants next to Sunflower's existing 360-megawatt plant outside Holcomb, in Finney County. Construction on the second plant would be finished in 2013.

How big is the project? The total generating capacity of 1,400 megawatts would be enough to supply all of the households in Denver, Oklahoma City and Albuquerque, N.M., combined. Sunflower and a sister company, Mid-Kansas Electric Co., have 400,000 customers; together, the two have 1,200 megawatts of generating capacity.
EDITORIAL

Pressure may prompt colleges to bring down tuition

Let's say the next time you pulled up to the gas pump, the price was $9.15 a gallon. Or the next time you went to the grocery store, a gallon of milk cost $15 and change.

Pretty outrageous, huh?

Well, if the prices of those two commodities had gone up as much as college tuition has increased since 1980, that's what you'd be paying.

So says the Center for College Affordability and Productivity in Washington, part of a growing chorus of voices speaking out about the escalating costs of tuition.

Recently, the organization took part in a Senate Finance Committee hearing in which some members of the panel asked why tuition keeps skyrocketing at the same time many college endowment funds are also hitting record levels.

Colleges hauled in billions and billions of dollars last year. According to The Associated Press, the endowment funds at 62 institutions of higher learning hit $1 billion, and the ranks of the billionaire colleges are expected to climb to 100 in a few years. The University of Kansas is one of the more recent schools to enter the 10-figure club, but the university's endowment is relatively small potatoes compared to the blockbusters at such institutions as Harvard and Yale, whose respective funds are at $34.9 billion and $22.5 billion.

With figures like those flying around, some policymakers have entertained the notion of requiring the richest colleges to use endowment money to ease the tuition burden on students and their parents.

Proponents say universities should provide tuition breaks and financial aid in return for the privilege they've been granted to invest tax-free.

On average, colleges spent 4.6 percent of their endowments last year, according to the National Association of College and University Business
Officers, but one Washington think-tank said the nation’s richest schools could provide $1.5 billion in tuition breaks and financial aid by spending a full 5 percent of their endowments annually.

The proposal has drawn howls of protest from college administrators, who say it would be an unacceptable intrusion by government into university affairs. Opponents also say that because endowment funding often comes with strings attached by donors on how it can be spent, it isn’t feasible to expect colleges to be able to tap the funds for any expense.

We’re far from sold on any plan that would increase government encroachment, but we couldn’t be happier that universities are being called out over tuition increases.

Hopefully, discussions like these will convince colleges to get a handle on the ballooning costs — before lawmakers step in and force their hand.

The Topeka Capital-Journal Editorial Board
Electric company CEO says coal will still be necessary

By John Hanna
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LAWRENCE — A regional utility’s top executive acknowledged the dangers of global warming and promoted conservation Thursday, but he said coal-fired power plants still will be necessary to satisfy rising demands for energy.

Bill Downey, president and chief executive officer of Kansas City Power & Light Co., spoke during a conference where two Kansas scientists also outlined potential problems that climate change could cause. They include hotter summers and shorter crop-growing seasons in western Kansas, they said.

Discussions at The University of Kansas conference were timely because of a debate over proposed coal-fired power plants in Kansas and Missouri. Environmentalists worry about coal plants’ potential emissions of carbon dioxide, which most scientists see as a major contributor to global warming.

In Kansas, Sunflower Electric Power Corp. is seeking an air-quality permit from the state for its $3.6 billion plan to expand its coal-fired plant in southwest Kansas. In Missouri, KCP&L is building a coal-fired plant northwest of Kansas City but promised environmentalists in March to develop wind power and energy conservation programs.

Downey said helping consumers reduce their energy use shows great promise but demand will still require higher energy production, including electricity from coal-fired plants. Technology to make coal burn cleaner and to capture and store carbon dioxide is an important part of reducing CO2 emissions, he said.

“Coal, oil and natural gas will remain indispensable,” he said. “It’s a hard truth that a rapidly growing world economy will require large increases in energy supplies over the next quarter-century.”

About 130 people attended the conference, including utility officials, legislative staff members, university scientists, and federal, state and local officials. Organizers wanted the event to touch on issues involving energy, the environment and the economy because they viewed them as intertwined.

But the mix of messages about the need for higher energy production and the potential problems from global warming troubled conference attendee Dan Nagengast, executive director of the Kansas Rural Center.

“It adds up to doom,” he said, chuckling over the clashing themes. “I don’t know where this goes, but it doesn’t look good.”

According to federal statistics, the United States generates almost half of its electricity from coal-fired plants, and Kansas and Missouri rely even more heavily on them. Three-quarters of Kansas’ electricity comes from coal-fired plants, while the figure is 85 percent for Missouri.

The federal government expects Americans’ demand for energy to grow over the next several decades, and Downey said KCP&L’s experiences back up that assumption.

It is a global trend as well. Timothy Carr, a senior scientist with the Kansas Geological Survey, said the worldwide demand for energy will increase as China and other developing nations seek to improve their standards of living.

“It’s not going to come from renewables,” Carr said. “It’s going to come from coal.”

Nagengast questioned what he saw as an assumption that citizens of developing nations will want to emulate westerners’ over-consumption of goods and services.

“I think to draw these charts out, assuming that the whole world is going to be sort of as gluttonous as we are and ever-increasingly so, probably underestimates just how people perceive the world,” he said.

But even in forecasting higher energy demands and use of coal, Downey and Carr said the potential issues must be addressed.

Johannes Feddema, a University of Kansas geology professor, said computer models suggest western Kansas would become drier with a rise in temperatures. And Charles Rice, a professor of soil microbiology at Kansas State University, said rains could become less frequent but more intense.

Because of concerns about CO2 emissions, Nagengast and other environmentalists want utilities to promote conservation and develop wind power.

Downey described efficiency programs as “the best near-term option” but said that during the next decade, “The reality is we need everything that we have.”

“What I get concerned about is when people say, ‘Well, we’ll do it all with one thing or another,”’ he said. “We can’t be placing one bet in this future.”
**KU student arrested after beating**

**Judge orders man held on $850,000 bond**

**The Associated Press**

LAWRENCE — A University of Kansas student has been charged in the bloody beating of a Lawrence woman.

Matthew Jaeger, 22, was arrested Tuesday after police rescued the badly beaten woman from a vehicle. The college senior, who is trained in Brazilian jiu-jitsu, is accused of attacking a female acquaintance so brutally that more than 24 hours later doctors still didn't know the extent of her injuries.

"This is extraordinarily horrific. The wounds are extraordinarily terrible," Douglas County Assistant District Attorney Dave Melton told a judge Wednesday during the suspect's first court appearance. Jaeger is charged with aggravated kidnapping, aggravated battery, aggravated burglary and making criminal threats. He is being held on a $850,000 bond.

Jaeger told Judge Stephen Sis via camera from the Douglas County Jail that "a lot of this could just be a big misunderstanding."

Police said Jaeger broke into an apartment and held the woman captive in a car.

Authorities found an ax, a martial arts knife and a Bowie knife in the vehicle.

Prosecutors said the woman has already undergone two surgeries at Lawrence Memorial Hospital and will require more.

The next court hearing is scheduled for Oct. 23.
Don't enroll at college without first visiting

I write this column having completed one College Fair in Overland Park and with another one to follow in Lawrence in my capacity as a graduate assistant with the University Honors Program at The University of Kansas.

I have a fond, if hazy, memory of attending a college fair more than 20 years ago, I think at Pembroke County Day School just off the Country Club Plaza in Kansas City, Mo.

A group of three or four of us made a road trip of it as we journeyed into the big city to seek our future.

At the time, I remember how little interest I had in continuing my education at KU, or as one of my classmates dubbed it “Topeka West East.” There was something to that characterization, because it seemed as if half or more of my graduating class made their way down I-70 to become Jayhawks.

There were some of us who resisted the strong gravitational pull of Mount Oread to attend schools like Pomona College, Grinnell College, Columbia College, Trinity University, Stanford University, Westminster College and other schools across the country.

To now stand on the other side of a recruiting table is an interesting experience. I see many parents who are quite interested in finding out what KU has to offer for a variety of reasons. However, I also see students like myself, who don’t see themselves staying so close to home to attend KU.

There is a palpable sense of excitement and anxiety, often in the face of the same parent or student who’s having to come to terms with the rite of passage to college, which often symbolizes the departure of one’s little baby who can’t possibly be old enough or mature enough to be going off to school.

In the brief time that I spend with these families, I can’t possibly say all that I’d like to. However, if given the chance I’d encourage parents and students to visit every school that’s a serious candidate on their lists. If you’re going to spend the next four or five years at a school, it’ll be worthwhile to get a first-hand view of the school and the community.

I’d tell these students to try to sit in on a class and to meet with current and perhaps recently graduated students of these schools. Finally, I’d tell them to follow their heart in making this decision. While I didn’t graduate from Reed College, I know I grew immeasurably from that year away from home in the Pacific Northwest.

As I walked down the hill on the day I graduated from KU, I definitely wasn’t the same person who’d left for Portland several years earlier. My worldview had been altered permanently by various professors and mentors over the years.

As the prominent educator Robert Maynard Hutchins once wrote: “A liberal education ... frees a man from the prison-house of his class, race, time, place, background, family and even his nation.”

Nicolas Shump is a doctoral student in American studies at The University of Kansas. He can be reached at Nico1225@sunflower.com.

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Power needs enter debate

Some question whether Kansas requires more coal plants

By John Hanna
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Debate: ‘Rural Kansas is going to benefit’

Continued from Page 1B

have 400,000 customers. Together, the two have 1,200 megawatts of generating capacity.

Sunflower would export much of the new power into other states and argues the new plants will lead to bigger transmission lines that could hook up to wind farms. Sunflower executives — and many legislators — have no doubt the power will be needed, both in rural Kansas and points well beyond.

“We’re entering into a time frame where energy growth is phenomenal,” said Sunflower spokesman Steve Miller. “It’s probably going to be a once-in-a-generation time when rural Kansas is going to benefit.”

The same growth in energy consumption is expected worldwide, something Carr noted in his conference presentation. The International Energy Agency projects that energy consumption will be 52 percent higher in 2030 than it was in 2004.

And, as Carr also noted, coal is expected to remain a big source, particularly as China, India and other developing nations attempt to catch up to an American or European standard of living.

Of course, that prospect raises fears about climate change. Bill Downey, president and chief executive officer of Kansas City Power & Light Co., said after his own conference speech, “We have to find a way to clean up coal.”

But at least a few environmentalists don’t accept Carr’s assessment of energy needs over the next few decades and believe conservation efforts can significantly slow any growth in energy demand.

Dan Nagengast, executive director of the Kansas Rural Center, said Americans shouldn’t assume that other nations will emulate the “gluttonous” U.S. lifestyle. And, he said, legislators, utility executives and analysts aren’t considering the potential of homes and farms generating their own, “off-grid” power from solar panels or windmills.

“Everybody’s defending a system,” Nagengast said. “There’s no thought in there that there’s other ways to be, other than, you know, a giant utility with giant coal plants and giant wind-turbine arrays.”

Even participants in the debate who aren’t contemplating such a future question Sunflower’s desire to build so much coal-fired generating capacity and sell most of the electricity outside the state.

“Do we want western Kansas to be the place where every other state builds their coal-fired plants?” Parkinson said.

Miller said such arguments make him “almost livid,” adding that Sunflower wants to export power for the same reason Kansans export other products, such as aircraft.

And Jim Owen, a spokesman for the Edison Electric Institute, a trade group for investor-owned utilities, said assuming that a company will generate power only for customers within an assigned territory is an old business model.

“Increasingly, we’re moving to regional electricity markets,” he said. “Distinctions of this nature will become less important.”

Owen, Sunflower and others accept projections that Americans’ demand for electricity will grow enough that new coal-fired power plants must be built to keep up with it. Environmentalists aren’t likely to concede the point.
Shots fired into KU dorm

University of Kansas authorities were investigating the report of gunshots being fired over the weekend into three windows at Lewis Hall.

Two window were hit on the east side of the building in the Ekdahl Dining Commons, commonly referred to as Mrs. E's. One window was hit on the west side of the building in the third-floor lobby.

The incident was reported to have occurred between 5:30 p.m. Saturday and 10:30 a.m. Sunday.

Anyone with information on the shooting may call the KU Public Safety office at (785) 864-5900 or KU Crime Stoppers at (785) 864-8888.

The Capital-Journal
Shoe design may be part of her future

A public transportation system consisting of individual pods and rentable chassis carried a University of Kansas senior all the way to the semifinals of an international car design competition.

Natalie Bonebrake was one of 50 students making the short list of the fifth annual Interior Motives Design Awards competition. The contest finals, for which Bonebrake didn’t qualify, were last month in Frankfurt, Germany.

She designed a system in which small vehicle pods hang from magnetic levitation tracks. Commuters enter their destination codes into a pod, which then is propelled through the city along the appropriate route. At the desired stations, the rider can exit the pod or be lowered onto a rentable chassis and drive away.

How did you get involved in this contest?

It was a required project for my industrial design class. The theme of the competition was “Solving the Paradox,” with the paradox being the need for personal mobility in large, crowded cities. The need is based on analysts’ predictions that within the next 20 to 30 years, 80 percent of the world’s population will live in megacities.

The class brainstormed and threw out words and phrases and designs that we had seen. Then we separated and tried to put those ideas into a design.

How much would a transportation system like the one you designed cost?

(Laugh) If society wanted it, they would find a way of funding it, of making it work. Just like they do today when they really want to do something.

Is your design realistic?

Right now, no, but it is something to work towards. I know there is a system out there that can help better the environment.

With design, you just throw the ideas out there. Some of the ideas might be kind of absurd, but not really. If you don’t have out-there thinking, life can be kind of boring. Maybe one of those ideas will be a catalyst for someone else’s idea that will be more realistic. They will look at your ideas and say, “I don’t like this and I don’t like that, but maybe I could use a small piece of this.”

Give me an example of an out-there idea that someone worked into a reality.

The cell phone. Years ago on “Star Trek” they had these little hand-held communication devices that are basically the same thing as our cell phones. Someone took an idea from a TV show and made something real out of it.

How much courage does it take to present an idea that is completely out there?

It doesn’t deal with courage. It shows how you think, how your brain operates.

I guess it does take some courage, though. Everyone has a creative spark in them, but some people hesitate on being different.

It seems like a big leap from designing public transportation systems to designing women’s shoes, which is what you want to do after graduation.

It isn’t big at all. My placement in this contest will look great on a resume. It shows that I can think in different ways, and that I have talents in other areas. Both fields require sketching, 3-D models and lots of research.

So, as a future shoe designer, how many pairs of shoes do you own?

Lots. Shoes are fun. Women understand. A woman looking at shoes is like a man looking at convertibles. You just want them.
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EDITORIALS

TUITION COSTS

Get a grip

Perhaps pressure from lawmakers will prompt colleges to bring down tuition

Let's say the next time you pulled up to the gas pump, the price was $9.15 a gallon.
Or the next time you went to the grocery store, a gallon of milk cost $15 and change.
Pretty outrageous, huh?
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So says the Center for College Affordability and Productivity in Washington, part of a growing chorus of voices speaking out about the escalating costs of tuition.
Recently, the organization took part in a Senate Finance Committee hearing in which some members of the panel asked why tuition keeps skyrocketing at the same time many college endowment funds are also hitting record levels.
Colleges hauled in billions and billions of dollars last year. According to The Associated Press, the endowment funds at 62 institutions of higher learning hit $1 billion, and the ranks of the billionaire colleges are expected to climb to 100 in a few years. The University of Kansas is one of the more recent schools to enter the 10-figure club, but the university's endowment is relatively small potatoes compared to the blockbusters at such institutions as Harvard and Yale, whose respective funds are at $34.9 billion and $22.5 billion.
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We're far from sold on any plan that would increase government encroachment, but we couldn't be happier that universities are being called out over tuition increases.
Hopefully, discussions like these will convince colleges to get a handle on the ballooning costs — before lawmakers step in and force their hand.
Senior students from South Gray High School were recently recognized for their academic accomplishments at the University of Kansas Honors Program. The banquet and recognition was held on the campus of Dodge City Community College Wednesday, October 10, 2007.

Recognized as the top 10 percent of their senior class, students were given a certificate and a small gift from the local area alumni contributors. Philip and Patricia Ridenour, Cimarron were the hosts of Gray County Students. University of Kansas Chancellor Robert Hemenway addressed the large group of Southwest Kansas seniors during the program.

Hannah Love, niece of Montezuma area residents, Greg and Sue Love, also spoke to students on their upcoming senior year and the many decisions and opportunities that lie before them. Ms. Love was also a Kansas Honors Student 4 years earlier.

Pictured left to right with University of Kansas Chancellor Robert Hemenway are Andy Skinner, Clyde Redger, Megan Gibson, Mr. Hemenway, Grant Holmes, and Brandon Koehn.