Votes coming on coal-fired plant

Kansas Senate panel backs measure to reverse denial of utility's plans to enlarge its electric-generating facility.

BY JIM SULLINGER AND DAVID KLEPPER
The Star's Topeka correspondents

TOPEKA | Kansas lawmakers appear headed toward a simple yes-no vote on a Kansas coal plant. A Senate committee on Monday endorsed legislation to allow Sunflower Electric Power Corp. to expand its Holcomb, Kan., plant. But the panel dropped other provisions — including restrictions on carbon emissions.

Those provisions had been touted as a compromise between Sunflower supporters and critics concerned about climate change. It's likely the full Senate could take up the legislation soon.

Republican Sen. Jay Emmler of Lindsborg, the committee's chairman, said the debate was about fairness. Sunflower's proposal met state and federal rules but was rejected anyway because it would put out carbon — an emission linked to global climate change but not regulated by the government.

"We still believe that the Legislature and the executive branch establish what the laws are, and that bureaucrats do not interpret those at their own whim," he said.

As it stands now, the bill would eliminate the discretionary authority used by the state's top regulator last year to reject the expansion.

Then Sunflower could reapply for a permit to add two 700-megawatt generators to its plant.

A House committee is set to vote today on a similar bill.

Internet phones

People who get phone service through the Internet may see a 4.65 percent boost in their monthly telephone bills by spring or early summer.

SEE LEGISLATURE | B5

FROM B1

By a 109-12 vote, the Kansas House on Monday approved SB 49, requiring customers of "voice over Internet protocol," or VOIP, to pay into the Kansas Universal Service Fund.

Regular telephone and cell phone customers already pay the fee, which varies with the size of the phone bill.

The average "per line" charge on a Sprint phone bill is $1.21 per month. The AT&T charge is $1.30.

The fund subsidizes phone service to rural areas that couldn't afford it on their own.

It also provides phone services at a reduced cost to low-income customers.

The House made several changes to a Senate-approved bill last year. The Senate must review those before the bill can go to the governor.

Extra funds for KU

University of Kansas Chancellor Robert Hemenway on Monday asked state legislators for an additional $8.4 million. Hemenway testified before the House Education Budget Committee.

Of the total, $5 million would help create more endowed professorships. He said $2.4 million would go toward producing more nursing, allied health, business and engineering graduates to address shortages in those areas around the state.

And $1 million would cover operating, recruitment and training costs for KU's UKanTeach program. It recruits and prepares people for careers as secondary mathematics and science teachers.

The Star's Mará Rose Williams contributed to this report.

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PROFILE | New leader at the local ACLU office looks ahead

A former banker finds a new cause

By ALAN GOFORTH
Special to The Star

Most people probably would not refer to the American Civil Liberties Union as a conservative organization.

But then, few people defy labels as much as Dan Winter, the new executive director of the ACLU of Kansas and Western Missouri.

“One could argue that we are the most conservative organization in the country, because at no point do we argue for bigger government,” he said. “We are champions of the right of Americans to be left alone.”

Winter, who succeeded longtime director Dick Kutiebach late last year, followed an unorthodox path to his position. His father was a Republican state senator in Kansas, and Winter himself was active in the party for a number of years.

“People have asked what motivated me to do this, coming from a Republican family,” he said. “When I was 10 years old, Martin Luther King Jr. was killed, and my father lowered our flag to half-staff. Somebody set our yard on fire, which left a deep impression on me. I’m fairly sure that led to a greater sensitivity about civil rights and people who are less well off.”

Winter studied journalism at the University of Kansas and banking at the University of Colorado. He became increasingly involved in community nonprofit work while...
serving as president and CEO of Peoplies Bank in Johnson County.

"I took my volunteer work as seriously as my career, to the extent it was possible," he said. "I left banking and wanted to get into nonprofit management."

Steve Stroade, owner of Contract Furnishings in Kansas City, commends the board for thinking outside the box. Winter was Stroade's banker when he started the business.

"Dan had planned for many years to find a time when he would leave banking and become involved in helping the community," Stroade said. "Any organization needs the strong business background that he brings, as well as his passion and energy."

Winter found the local office in good shape when he arrived. "ACLU membership has doubled nationally in the seven years of the Bush administration, and our local membership has reflected that as well," he said. "The financial side of the organization is very strong."

Winter has been setting priorities in an election year.

"We represent all of Kansas, as well as Missouri to just west of Columbia," he said. "It's a real challenge to work with two different statehouses, and there is a significant difference in culture from western Kansas to the Ozarks."

The top priority for 2008 is the Missouri Civil Rights Initiative that may be on the November ballot.

"We are working to educate the people of Missouri that affirmative action is not a quota or a giveaway, but a leveling of the playing field," Winter said.

"We are working with our eastern Missouri affiliate and allied organizations to fight efforts to amend our state constitution."

Winter has ambitious goals beyond this year.

"We want to build a state- and region-wide organization," he said. "We want to take the ACLU to outstate Kansas and Missouri. It's about creating an identity."

He hopes part of that identity will include changing longstanding perceptions.

"A lot of people, for example, don't understand that we don't defend what the KKK says, but we defend their right to free speech," he said. "We are not a radical, liberal organization. Our ACLU group of young members even had a party in December called 'The ACLU Doesn't Hate Christmas.'"
 Universities honored for contributing through service

Twelve Missouri and six Kansas universities received recognition Monday for contributions to service in their communities.

The universities were included in the second annual President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, announced at the annual meeting of the American Council on Education in San Diego.

Four Missouri schools, comprising the University of Missouri-Kansas City, Rockhurst University, Northwest Missouri State University and Missouri State University, were among 127 institutions recognized as Honor Roll with Distinction members.

Eight other Missouri schools and six Kansas schools, including the University of Kansas, Fort Hays State University and Emporia State University, were among the 391 schools listed as Honor Roll members.

The Honor Roll is sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service, the U.S. Department of Education, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, USA Freedom Corps, Campus Compact, and the President’s Council on Service and Civic Participation.

Mará Rose Williams,
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Army, KU program aimed at 'Wounded Warriors'

SPECIAL TO THE CURRENT

Army and academic officials joined together Wednesday to announce a new program for wounded soldiers.

Secretary of the Army Pete Geren and University of Kansas Chancellor Robert Hemenway welcomed eight Army soldiers into the Wounded Warrior Education Initiative Program as part of a joint announcement Wednesday, Feb. 6, at the Combined Arms Center, Fort Leavenworth.

This pilot program, initiated by the secretary of the Army, allows severely wounded soldiers the opportunity to complete a master's degree, then return to the Army and work in assignments where the Combined Arms Center benefits from their education and personal experiences.

Active-duty soldiers will remain in the Army, and those who are retired due to injuries will either assume positions as instructors or will convert to Department of the Army civilian status and move into positions where their master's degree will best support the Combined Arms Center.

Soldiers will incur an active-duty service obligation of six years upon completion of the Army-funded program.

To be eligible for this program, soldiers must be enrolled in the Army Wounded Warrior (AW2) program. The AW2 program, in existence since April 2004, provides long-term support to soldiers who are 30 percent or more disabled, and their families.

The Army Wounded Warrior program and this new education initiative are part of the Army's commitment to Warriors in Transition, focusing on wounded and severely wounded soldiers and their families.

The criteria used for selecting the initial eight soldiers in the pilot program included having a bachelor's degree, a strong desire to participate in the initiative and a desire to continue to serve. Soldiers will be assigned to the Combined Arms Center with duty at KU.
KU'S FALL 2007 HONOR ROLL FOR AREA STUDENTS

More than 4,540 undergraduate students at the University of Kansas earned honor roll distinction for the fall 2007 semester. These students, from KU's Lawrence campus and the schools of allied health and nursing in Kansas City, Kan., represent 96 of 105 Kansas counties, 43 other states and the District of Columbia and 39 other countries.

Jennifer Lynne Hoover daughter of Roger and Sherry Wallace Journalism Undergraduate Junior 2007 Fall Honor Roll Burlington High School Burlington KS

Lance Harris Jones son of Lane Jones Liberal Arts Undergraduate Sophomore 2007 Fall Honor Roll Burlington High School Burlington KS

Wyatt Edward Meriwether - Fine Arts Undergraduate Senior 2007 Fall Honor Roll Burlington High School Burlington KS

Lacie Rochelle Reed daughter of Debbie and Stacy Reed Education Undergraduate Junior 2007 Fall Honor Roll Burlington High School Burlington KS

Tyrel Richard Reed son of Stacy and Debbie Reed Liberal Arts Undergraduate Sophomore 2007 Fall Honor Roll Burlington High School Burlington KS

Synthia Rae Somerhalder daughter of Samuel and Sandra Somerhalder Liberal Arts Undergraduate Junior 2007 Fall Honor Roll Burlington High School Burlington KS

Scott Carlton Birdson of Tammi and Brian Hanson Business Undergraduate Senior 2007 Fall Honor Roll Burlington High School Burlington KS

Sabrina Coreen Gregersen daughter of David and Teresa Gregersen Liberal Arts Undergraduate Senior 2007 Fall Honor Roll Le Roy High School Le Roy KS
Kansas Wheat and K-State receive Bioscience Authority Grant

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Kansas Wheat and Kansas State University announced today that they have received a $200,000 planning grant from the Kansas Bioscience Authority for the purpose of developing plans for the proposed Kansas Innovation Center for Advanced Plant Design: "Plants for the Heartland."

The Kansas Bioscience Centers of Innovation program is designed to establish centers of excellence that will clearly define Kansas as an international leader in research and commercialization for one or more bioscience platforms that will have a substantial, measurable and sustainable positive impact on the state’s economy.

At the end of the six-month planning grant period, the Bioscience Authority will review all submitted proposals and may award contracts for the completion of proposed centers.

The Kansas Innovation Center for Advanced Plant Design: "Plants for the Heartland" would focus on the emerging commercial opportunities for wheat, sorghum, small grains and native plants and grasses. By coordinating efforts across the state, nation and the world, the Center would accelerate scientific discoveries and innovation in plant bioscience.

The Center would be business collaboration among plant science industry groups and university research counterparts. The Kansas Wheat Commission of Manhattan and K-State will be the lead organization for founding the Center.

Facilities for the Center would be headquartered on the campus of Kansas State University in Manhattan, collaborating with existing research programs at the University of Kansas in Lawrence and elsewhere. The Center would unlock the power of plant genomes to create a host of novel products.

"The Center would be a pivotal opportunity for Kansas," said Kansas Wheat chief executive officer Dusty Fritz. "World food security depends on three major (wheat, rice, maize) and several minor (barley, sorghum, millets) cereal crops. Kansas is a major producer of two of these crops (wheat and sorghum). The current global shortage of wheat and sorghum demonstrates the opportunity that exists for Kansas to be in a pivotal position to lead innovation in these crops and continue as the breadbasket of the world.

"These crops now have the opportunity to meet other energy and industrial needs as we transition from fossil fuels into renewable sources of energy and industrial goods. These fields of biosciences offer unprecedented opportunity to identify genetic advantages to redesign plants for target uses. The establishment of this center would be a game-changing opportunity for Kansas to take the pre-mier leadership role in this new economy based on high-tech science."

The Center’s Native Plants Innovation Team will be led by Dr. Barbara Timmerman, University Distinguished Professor and Chair of Medicinal Chemistry at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. Native Plants Team members will include faculty and staff from the University of Kansas, Kansas State University and the KU Medical Center. The Team’s efforts will focus on using advanced plant design techniques to produce novel therapeutic drugs derived from Kansas native plants.

"The Kansas Innovation Center for Advanced Plant Design will build a strong new future for exploration, discovery and development of valuable natural products that prevent and cure diseases in humans and animals," KU’s Tim-merman said.

Dr. Fred Cholick, Dean of K-State’s College of Agriculture and director of K-State Research and Extension said, “This center will position Kansas as the global leader in plant genetics by translating in- novative research into value-added agricul tural products delivered to the market place. For Kansas, this would create new jobs and attract the best and brightest minds in plant bioscience to Manhattan, Kansas. Overall, it will enhance the economy of Kansas and the region, particularly in rural areas.”

"There is a new era emerging in agriculture. Wheat and sorghum are currently losing ground to corn and soybean production. In spite of their lack of environ-
mental compatibility for much of the state, corn and soybeans currently offer a short-term economic advantage to producers, and are more preferred by end users in the livestock and biofuel sectors," said Kansas Wheat Commissioner Dean Stoskopf. "Because of this approach, profitability for dryland farmers is at risk and ground water resources are being depleted. Advanced plant design affords a sustainable, long-term solution to this challenge by improving the performance of wheat and sorghum, which are better suited for Kansas. Bioscience is the key to unlocking the maximum potential of crops grown for the benefit of the state's economy and the world's consumers."
More than 4,500 undergraduate students at the University of Kansas earned honor roll distinction for the fall 2007 semester.

The honor roll comprises undergraduates how meet requirements in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and in the allied health, architecture and urban design, business, education, engineering, fine arts, journalism, nursing and social welfare schools.

Leavenworth County honor roll students are as follows: From Basehor, Elizabeth A. Bartkoski, daughter of John and DeAnn Bartkoski, senior, business; David Wayne Beck, son of David and Mary Beck, liberal arts, sophomore; Steven Andrew Bower son of, Thea and Douglas Bower, liberal arts, junior; Abby Jo Page, daughter of Rob and Nancy Page, liberal arts, senior; Amy D. Rousseau, daughter of Thomas and Tammy Rousseau, education, senior; and Holly Lynne Sebree, daughter of Lynne and Nancy Sebree, pharmacy.

Easton: Devon B. Ezell, daughter of Joseph and Mary Ezell, liberal arts, senior.

Fort Leavenworth: Adam F. Chura, son of Michael and Monica Chura, engineering, senior; Holly Ann Hayworth, daughter of Brad and Kim Hayworth, liberal arts, senior; John Dannley Kenny, son of Kraig and Deborah Kenny, engineering, senior; Ashley Nicole Langford, daughter of James and Deborah Hevel, pharmacy; Joseph Charles Tennant, son of Stephen and Marianne Tennant, liberal arts, junior; and Elizabeth Helen Whitford, daughter of Brenda and Dean Whitford, liberal arts, sophomore.

Lansing: Kayla M. Buehler, daughter of David and Lisa Buehler, liberal arts, senior; Kyle Joseph Buehler, son of David and Lisa Buehler, liberal arts, sophomore; Alison Elizabeth Cain, daughter of John and Judith Cain, liberal arts and fine arts, senior; Elizabeth Ann Cristiano, daughter of Peter and Christine Cristiano, liberal arts, sophomore; Alicia Kadie Cusano, daughter of Rhonda Taylor, liberal arts, sophomore; Andrew James DeHaan, son of Robert and Denise DeHaan, liberal arts, junior; Patrick Kelly Dolan, son of Dennis and Taeko Dolan, liberal arts, junior; Melissa Marie Farr, daughter of Lenae Farr, liberal arts, junior; Brandon Michael Froelich, son of David Froelich, architecture and liberal arts, senior; Alexandria Marie Henderson, daughter of Deborah Henderson, liberal arts, freshman; Ashley Lynn Hunsaker, daughter of Oren and Joan Hunsaker, liberal arts, senior; Javen Wayne Kelly, son of Kyle and Vickie Kelly, liberal arts, sophomore; David Lawrence Kern, son of Brian and Sandra Kern, liberal arts, sophomore; Katharyn Elizabeth Mooney, daughter of Tim and Karen Mooney, liberal arts, senior; Andrew William Phillips, son of Bruce and Laura Phillips, liberal arts, junior; Brooke Ann Raasch, daughter of Denise Lally, liberal arts, senior; Holly Nicole Robertson, daughter of Ginger Robertson, liberal arts, senior; and Jessica Marie Stark, daughter of Christine and Russ Stark, liberal arts, sophomore.

Leavenworth: Jessica Elizabeth Adkinson, daughter of Rick and Sherry Adkinson, liberal arts, senior; Ryan Nicholas Agnew, son of Gerard and Nancy Agnew, fine arts, sophomore; Bruce Albert Archambault III, liberal arts, junior; Emily Nicole Birk, daughter of Catherine Boney, education, senior; Laurel Elizabeth Bond, daughter of Kevin and June Bond, liberal arts, freshman; Andrea Michaele Cox, social welfare, junior; Michael Patrick Crandall, liberal arts, sophomore; Mark Alan Darling, son of Douglas Darling, business and engineering, senior; Colby James Dixon, son of Robert Dixon, liberal arts, sophomore;
Stephanie Nicole Dumolt, daughter of James and Aleida Dumolt, liberal arts, senior; Bret A. Elliott, son of James and Cathy Elliott, business, senior; Thomas William Gregor, son of William and Cheryl Gregor, engineering, senior; Krystle Rose Harsch, daughter of Nancy Harsch, business and liberal arts, senior; Deanna Elizabeth Hogan, daughter of Leann Fitzgerald, liberal arts, sophomore; John Arthur Irvine, son of Marcia and John Irvine, business and liberal arts, senior; Tiffanie Lynn James, daughter of Tracie Lafontaine, liberal arts, freshman; Benjamin Jacob Jeffries, son of Kristi Roberts, liberal arts, junior; Alexandra Jean Kell, fine arts, senior; Garrett Michael Kelly, son of Michael E. and Keyta D. Kelly, liberal arts, junior; Lucinda A. Koenig, liberal arts, senior; Melanie Marie Kurz, daughter of Mary Dutton, liberal arts, sophomore; Jennifer Lynn Lawrence, daughter of Michael and Cheryl Dufresne, nursing, senior; Michelle Renee Loewenstein, daughter of James and Janet Loewenstein, liberal arts, senior; Michaela Nicol McCann, daughter of Michael and Helen McCann, education, senior; Mary C. Melton, daughter of Sallie Melton, liberal arts, senior; Brian Lee Palmer, son of Clifford and Deb Palmer, liberal arts, junior; Grace Young Runyan, daughter of James and Yong Runyan, liberal arts, freshman; Tara Lynnette Skaggs, daughter of Karen Skaggs, fine arts, senior; Colby Jennings Smith, son of Charlie and Michael McSweeney, liberal arts, senior; Karen E. Smith, daughter of Ron and Sandra Smith, liberal arts, senior; Courtney Dawn Steele, daughter of Robert and Patricia Steele, education, junior; Zachary Coleman Stephens, son of Garry and Linda Stephens, business, senior; Ashley Michelle Tacadena, daughter of Steve and Ki Tacadena, education, junior; Diana Marlene Toro, daughter of Vincent and Anna Toro, liberal arts, sophomore; Taylor Michael Wiley, son of Angela and Willard Wiley, liberal arts, freshman; and Andrew Hartley Winetroub, son of Elizabeth Winetroub, liberal arts, senior.

Gunn, daughter of Tom and Mary Gunn, liberal arts, sophomore; and Caitlin Nicole Rose, daughter of Larry Rose, liberal arts, senior.

Tonganoxie: Tristan L. Bowersox, son of Kevin and Jodi Bowersox, fine arts, sophomore; Todd Allen Davidson, son of Mona Hamby, liberal arts, junior; John Clifton Davis, son of Jean and Randy Davis, liberal arts, sophomore; Kelly David Gabbens, son of Michael Gabbens, liberal arts, senior; Robert John Harnden, son of William and Robin Harnden, liberal arts, senior; Alyssa Grace Lorenz, daughter of Jo Anne Abbate, liberal arts, freshman; Paula Frances Prosser, daughter of Lewis and Susan Prosser, fine arts, sophomore; Spencer Mark Seman, son of Mark and Patricia Seman, liberal arts, junior; Justin Douglas Smith, son of Frank and Jeanne Smith, engineering, sophomore; John Charles Wickey, son of John and Ruth Wickey, liberal arts, senior; and James Austin Young, son of Carolyn Young, liberal arts, sophomore.
Army, KU launches pilot program for wounded soldiers

By JOHN RICHMEIER
TIMES STAFF WRITER

The University of Kansas has put out the welcome mat for wounded soldiers.

University Chancellor Robert Hemenway said he looked forward to welcoming eight soldiers and retired soldiers to KU as part of a pilot program announced Wednesday at Fort Leavenworth. Hemenway and Pete Geren, secretary of the Army, were on hand for the announcement about the Army Wounded Warrior Education Initiative.

“It’s an exciting pilot program for our nation,” Geren said.

The program will give soldiers who have been severely wounded the opportunity to attend graduate school at KU. Once they’ve completed their degrees, they will work in Army assignments in support of the Combined Arms Center, which has its headquarters at Fort Leavenworth.

“They’re going to have the opportunity to teach,” said Ronald James, assistant secretary of the Army for manpower and Reserve affairs.

Each soldier in the program will have an active-duty service obligation of three years for every 12 months of study, one official said following Wednesday’s ceremony.

Those in the program who are retired due to injuries will either assume positions as instructors or convert to the Department of the Army civilian status, according to a news release.

Seven of the eight soldiers and retired soldiers selected for the pilot program were on hand for Wednesday’s announcement.

“...And I look forward to welcoming them as graduate students in the near...”

Hemenway said.

Capt. Gates Brown, a Lansing High School graduate, said he won’t have to pay KU tuition as part of his participation in the pilot program. He said it will be paid by the Army. And he will continue to be paid as an Army officer while a KU student.

Gates, who was wounded by an improvised explosive device attack in 2007, said it looks like he will start classes in the fall. He said he wants to study military history. Once he finishes his degree, he probably will be an instructor at the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth.

Staff Sgt. Tom Davis, who was wounded by an IED in 2006, said he plans to obtain a master’s degree in information technology. After receiving the degree, he’s looking at working with the Battle Command Training Program at Fort Leavenworth.

The seven program participants who were on hand Wednesday were presented with certificates and KU hats during the ceremony.

Geren said the partnership between KU and the Army goes back decades.

“Last September, Chancellor Hemenway came to Washington,” Geren said.

He credited Hemenway with an idea that resulted in the new pilot program.

Hemenway said the program will benefit the Army and the nation. He said it also will be great for KU. The program may be expanded to include Reserve component soldiers as well as other universities and Army institutions, according to information provided by the Army.

During his comments Wednesday, Hemenway mentioned a “rock, chalk, Jayhawk” chant used at KU.

“Let’s try it as we end this program,” he said.

He then said, “Rock, chalk,” and members of the audience completed the phrase.
Governor wants energy standards law

By SARAH KESSINGER
kessinger@dailynews.net

TOPEKA (HNS) — The governor now says her voluntary standards for renewable power in Kansas aren't enough - they should be law.

At a press briefing in her office Friday, Gov. Kathleen Sebelius said she'd like to see legislators codify goals for power companies to invest 10 percent in green energy by 2010 and 20 percent by 2020.

Her statement comes as 27 states have mandated renewable standards and the federal government is discussing doing so as well.

Kansas utilities traditionally have opposed such mandates. Instead, Sebelius and executives of the state's power companies agreed last year to voluntary goals.

Since then, utilities have said they expect to meet them and have continued to announce new wind energy investments.

A Kansas City Power & Light spokesman said the company didn't believe a mandate was necessary.

"Kansas City Power & Light is already pursuing, subject to regulatory approval, our commitment to the governor's voluntary wind energy goal," said Mike Deggendorf, vice president of public affairs.

The company noted the governor didn't clarify at Friday's press conference whether the state should have a mandatory or voluntary standard in law.

Still, Kansas remains at about 4 percent wind power, with the remainder of its electricity generated mostly from coal as well as some natural gas and nuclear energy.

Legislators who drafted a bill to facilitate construction of two new coal-fired plants this week added some green energy provisions as well, but didn't go as far as adding a renewable mandate.

Rep. Annie Kuether, D-Topeka, and Sen. Janis Lee, D-Kensington, who helped author the bill, were questioned about the issue during a Democratic caucus Wednesday.

Kuether responded that a renewable portfolio standard had not been discussed. When asked why, Kuether said it was because "there has been a sense in this state than an RPS would not pass."

However Rep. Tom Holland, D-Baldwin, said Friday that he's seen plenty of interest in more action to require wind, solar and other forms of power.

Holland, a panelist on green energy at public forums that drew crowds last week at Baker University and the University of Kansas, said he'd "love having a renewable portfolio standard."

"I think that's a very long-term energy strategy our state and country needs to have going forward," Holland said.

Constituents appear to be ahead of their legislators in calling for change on the energy scene, he added.

"I think this is really something that's starting to catch the public's attention."

Nancy Jackson, executive director of the Land Institute's Climate and Energy Project at Salina, said there's a strong case to be made for renewable portfolio standards requiring utilities to dedicate part of their investments to clean energy.

"It should be fairly easy to achieve," she said. "Our primary goal is to see energy efficiency and wind energy pursued aggressively and other states with a (renewable standard) have shown it's possible to do that."
Riders and community welcome home Major Soper

By Deana Horn
The Gyp Hill Premiere

The American Legion Riders from Post #69 welcomed home Major James Soper Saturday, January 19 from Iraq. Paralee, Soper’s wife, called Lonnie Small, Director of ALR, from Fort Riley to let the ALR know the time of the arrival.

“I was totally oblivious of what was going to happen,” Soper said. “I was pretty taken back.”

When he got home, he found yellow ribbons and a huge “Welcome Home Major Soper” sign at the entrance to his home.

Soper found the participation of each rider special. He was appreciative that one rider had traveled from Kiowa to Medicine Lodge for the “welcome home” ride.

“It was extra special because Lonnie is my cousin,” Soper said. “My second cousin, Bill Gallaugher, followed the motorbikes in and was part of the group.”

Soper recently retired from the US Army, for the second time.

“The first time I retired was in 1994,” Soper stated. “I was retired for 12 years to the month when they reinstated me.”

Soper was part of a MTT, Military Transition Team. He recently served in the Second Brigade Second Iraqi Division for one year in Mosul, Iraq, along with a ten-man team to train 1,200 Iraqi soldiers.

This is the third war that Soper has served in. He has served with the US Army in Vietnam, Somalia and Iraq.

Since enlisting in 1968, Soper has served a total of 23 years in active duty. He is more than ready to stop traveling the world and stay close to home with his wife.

“I am very ecstatic to have him home,” Paralee said, “very much so.”

Jim and Paralee have three children; Karen, Diane and Ryan; and four grandchildren.

Soper has taken a civilian position with the University of Kansas teaching with the Army ROTC. This position will allow him to spend at least a portion of his time in Medicine Lodge.

“To have this homecoming to end all of my years,” Soper said, “it was really special.”

After retiring from the U.S. Army, Major James Soper and his wife, Paralee, relax at home. D. Horn Photo