

# OPINION

The Hays Daily News

FRIDAY, MARCH 14, 2008

Editorial

## Prison project

### Yates Center needs to back off demand for \$39.5M expansion

We can appreciate Yates Center lobbying hard for a new, 240-bed drug-and-alcohol treatment center for prison inmates. Much any other Kansas community, Yates Center's best economic rests to pursue both private and ic projects.

he problem is, Kansas doesn't a new prison right now. In fact, rding to the Kansas Sentenc- Commission, current projections t anticipate needing any more on space until 2017.

's up to the Legislature to resolve expensive contradiction. And se Judiciary Committee Chair- Mike O'Neal, R-Hutchinson, is ng to prevent \$39.5 million from g spent needlessly. Rep. O'Neal's would take away the authority of Kansas Department of Correc- s to spend that amount, which Legislature already had approved

last year. The bill is expected to receive a hearing on the House floor today.

We encourage lawmakers to separate the emotional arguments offered by those promoting the Yates Center project and the simple facts put forth by the Sentencing Commission. The contrast in positions is stark.

According to Rep. Bill Otto, R-LeRoy, "How can we go back to our constituents and say we don't need more drug treatment and prison space? We're putting our heads in the sand if we say we don't need more prison space."

Corrections Secretary Roger Werholtz said: "We're not going to build anything until we need the beds."

This appears rather straightforward to us. The parochial arguments need to be set aside, and the Legislature needs to scuttle any and all prison expansion plans.

We'll be more supportive of Yates Center's ambition when it aligns with actual state requirements. To do otherwise would be a waste of taxpayer dollars.

Editorial by Patrick E. Lowry  
plowry@dailynews.net

The editorials represent the institutional voice of The Hays Daily News but are signed by the author of the reader's information. Guest editorials are from other newspapers and do not necessarily represent views of The Hays Daily News. Other content on this page represents the views of the signed columnist, cartoonist or letter-writer. The Opinion page is intended to be a community forum. Guest editorials and syndicated columnists are selected to present a variety of opinion.

## Reader Forum

### One solution to solving a community need

number of weeks ago, dentist Jeffrey Lowe was featured rather nificantly in your publication. At time, he expressed his gratitude eing so fortunate as to be in his

federal depreciation, they can reduce their income tax payments by around \$175 million over this period. Since state income tax is calculated on federal payments at a 7.35 percent marginal rate, Kansas will chip in \$12.8 million in tax breaks over the same period. If you own any kind of business, you have to be jealous

Guest column

## Holcomb holds environmental promise



Kathleen White

COMMENTARY

I watch with keen interest the on-going debate over the Holcomb Power Station expansion for two reasons. I am a fifth-generation Kansan who cherishes my home state. And less than two months before the Holcomb permit was denied in Kansas, as then-chairwoman of the Texas counterpart of Kansas Department of Health and Environment, I issued permits for the first Texas lignite coal-fired power plant in 20 years. The controversy around this permit was as feverish, if not more, than the Holcomb debate, because in addition to alleged climate change impacts, the ozone levels in the Dallas-Fort Worth region exceed federal standards.

As final decision maker, I was urged to deny the Texas coal-fired permit on many fronts: by my fellow commissioner, an administrative law judge, the mayor of Dallas, and environmental organizations. I did not dismiss their arguments lightly. However, I approved the permit with strong conviction that this new power plant, equipped with groundbreaking emission controls, was a net environmental benefit for Texas.

Most importantly, the Texas permit, like Holcomb, met and went beyond all the requirements of substantive federal and state law. Under the oath of office I took to uphold the law, it was my duty to approve permits that complied with all applicable legal requirements. In my role as a regulator, it would have been constitutionally egregious to make final state decisions by creative interpretations of my authority in place of specific law. Such action is especially troubling when it involves an issue as complex as climate change.

In truth, denial of the Holcomb permit will achieve absolutely none of the temperature savings outlined by the 2007 U.N. Intergovernmental

Panel on Climate Change Fourth Assessment Report. According to the IPCC, the magnitude of greenhouse gas reduction necessary to avoid "dangerous interference with the climate" is 50 to 85 percent of the global levels of 2000. A massive undertaking. Lost in the outcry over CO2 are these considerations:

CO2 represents only 5 percent of global greenhouse gas. CO2 added by human activity like power plants constitutes only 3.4 percent of all CO2.

Emissions of sulfur dioxide and mercury can be controlled by commercially available, costly but effective technology. The technical means to capture CO2 do not yet exist on a commercial scale.

CO2 is wholly unlike conventional pollutants now regulated. Pollutants associated with coal-fired power plants like sulfur dioxide and mercury, in certain concentrations and proximate exposures, can directly impact human health. In contrast, the location of CO2 is irrelevant in climate change science. CO2 is a ubiquitous chemical in natural processes and a byproduct of energy production from fossil fuels.

As predicted by the reigning science of the IPCC, the risk of global warming from human-induced greenhouse gases like CO2 is an uncertain, remote, gradual risk with impacts predicted in 100 years or more.

In the last few years, U.S. levels of CO2 have slightly declined as a result of energy and economic efficiency while CO2 emissions in developing

countries like China and India have soared. China builds the equivalent of a 600 megawatt coal-fired power plant every week and with few if any of the emission controls now standard in the United States.

The Holcomb project's planned integration with the Sunflower Bio-energy Center will play important ground for developing productive CO2 use. The center's planned algae based bio-diesel facility will use some of the CO2 and nitrogen oxide from the Holcomb flue gas as a form of fertilizer. For those concerned about the risk of climate change, this should be environmentally celebrated, not blocked. With power plants, "new" means dramatically cleaner. Built with cutting edge technology, the planned new Holcomb units — like those in the permit I issued — can achieve far greater emission controls than any existing power plants. I am not surprised that with operation of the new mercury controls in the Holcomb permit, total mercury emissions from the one old and two new units will be less than mercury emissions from the existing unit. Thanks to ever-improving technology, these new coal fired plants in Kansas and Texas have emission levels comparable to natural gas plants.

After years in Texas, this Kansan now well knows that Texans are rarely humble. Texas, however, should be inspired by the bold innovation and environmental responsibility shown in the plan for the Holcomb Plant Expansion and the Sunflower Integrated Bio-energy Center. Kansas and the whole country will benefit from the successful operation of this project.

Kathleen Hartnett White grew up in Salina. She recently completed a six-year term as chairwoman of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and is director of the Center for Natural Resources for the Texas Public Policy Foundation.