

The Crescent-News

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OPINION

Paying more for using less energy

COLUMBUS — It was hailed as a “landmark energy reform bill” that would prevent the kind of spikes that utility customers in other states experienced and prompt companies to implement green and renewable means of generation for the betterment of the state.

Gov. Ted Strickland praised it for “making sure customers have equal footing with utilities” and for the “transparency and accountability” built into its provisions.

“This bill, Senate Bill 221, will ensure predictability of affordable energy prices and maintain state controls necessary to protect Ohio jobs and businesses,” Strickland said in May 2008 when he signed the legislation into law. “We will safeguard Ohio families by empowering consumers and modernizing Ohio’s energy infrastructure. ... I am proud to be here today with Ohio’s legislative leadership. We can all be proud of this bill.”



MARC KOVAC

But you knew there had to be something screwy about SB 221. It’s too big a bill and filled with too many provisions that average, on-the-street Ohioans can’t grasp not to have a few unpleasant surprises.

One of those came to light (pardon the pun) earlier this month, when FirstEnergy announced its plan to deliver millions of light bulbs to customers, then charge them over the next several years to pay for the costs.

That’s something lawmakers and the governor didn’t spotlight during their praise of the energy bill — the fact that utilities would be charging customers extra to meet the efficiency mandates included within the legislation.

Which would be laughable if it wasn’t true. Think about it: You’re going to have to pay more for using less energy.

On the surface, it doesn’t seem like a lot of money — an average of about 60 cents per month. I know these are hard times, but I see enough people going in and out of coffee shops to know that average Ohioans still have a few bucks to blow on frivolity.

But there’s a principle here that does not sit well with the paying populace, and that is being forced to foot the bill for something that you didn’t order in the first place.

As Clevelander Cynthia Mooney put it in a recent letter to the Public Utilities Commission, “[FirstEnergy] indicated that they are going to send them and charge me for them whether I request the bulbs or not. That is incredulous. ... I would never make a request for these bulbs. I did not consent to the delivery of these bulbs to my home; therefore, I am not required to make a payment for an item I did not order.”

PUCO will entertain oral arguments on the issue later this month, giving FirstEnergy, the Ohio Consumers’ Counsel and other groups (but not the general public) a chance to present their case.

You can be sure FirstEnergy isn’t going to be left holding the bill for 3.75 million energy-efficient light bulbs. Lawmakers and Gov. Ted Strickland okayed cost recovery for such costs as part of their energy bill, and PUCO has already said its proper for the company to seek payback.

“The Legislature recognizes that there’s a cost to energy efficiency,” FirstEnergy spokesman Ellen Raines told me earlier this month. “It’s not free ... the costs would be recovered from customers.”

(Marc Kovac is the Dix Capital Bureau Chief. E-mail him at mkovac@dixcom.com or on Twitter at Ohio Capital Blog.)

Rules for letters

Letters to the editor concerning the Nov. 3 election must be received by noon on Thursday, Oct. 29. No election-related letters will be published after Sunday, Nov. 1.

Letters must be 500 words or less with one writer’s name only.

No group, form or unsigned letters will be published, nor will those concerning disputes with businesses. Letters must also include the writer’s address and telephone number for verification. Only the writer’s town will be published.

Priority is given to letters addressing issues of general community interest. Letters may be edited to meet space and other requirements.

Writers will be limited to one letter per month unless they are named in a rebuttal. They would then be entitled to an additional rebuttal.



‘To the editor’

Voters should support Issue 2

In July, the Ohio General Assembly passed a resolution to place a measure on the November 2009 ballot that would create the Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board.

We don’t need a Washington D.C. lobbyist group telling us how to run our farms. The Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board will be our voice. Please continue to support the local humane societies, but do not send money to the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS).

Ninety-six percent of the money sent to the HSUS is spent on salaries to lobby against animal agriculture, with only 4 percent going to save animals. Their agenda is to make meat so unaffordable that it forces everyone to become vegetarian.

Agriculture is Ohio’s number one industry. With \$90 billion annually and 920,000 jobs related to it, we don’t need the unemployment rate to go higher. Ohioans consume 70 percent of their protein needs from meat, eggs and milk produced from Ohio farms.

I have been involved in agriculture my entire life. I was a 4-H member for 10 years and a former 4-H advisor. Currently, I am a life member of the FFA Alumni, a member of Henry County Farm Bureau, and the Henry County and Ohio Pork Producers.

As a lifelong resident of Henry County and a full-time grain and livestock farmer, I would like to ask the people of Henry County and the State of Ohio to vote yes on Issue 2. If you have any questions go to ohiolivestock-care.com.

Michael Miller
rural Napoleon

Ribfest prompted concern

I want to thank everyone involved with putting on another great ribfest in Defiance.

I know the list is very long, so I won’t even try to mention everyone involved. I just want to say thank you as it was very successful again.

I thought that there was plenty of food vendors, plenty of seating and the bands were great. The whole atmosphere was wonderful and I was glad to be part of it. I’ve been to two of the three ribfests, and I think it’s a great event for Defiance.

My concern is that I was surprised to see only one beer vendor. I don’t know the rules and regulations on the food and beverage vendors, but I was surprised not to see our other beer distributor. This decision had to be made by someone because I’m sure the other distributor would have been involved if asked to.

There are a lot of local men and women employed by the other distributor and I’m sure they would have been proud to see their goods and products being sold at such a great event. Like I said, I don’t know the rules and regulations, but I just hope politics aren’t getting involved. Let’s try within the rules and regulations to let anyone and everyone participate if they choose to do so. If we are doing this to beer vendors, are we also doing this to rib vendors?

Philip Hall
Defiance

Obama not telling the truth

When I watched clips of President Obama’s speech to the joint session of Congress, it was easy to tell when he was lying. His lips moved!

Rep. Wilson was only guilty of saying out loud what thousands of Americans were thinking. Obama said he would cover millions of people who don’t currently have health insurance and not increase the national debt. He said Medicare reforms could help cover the costs of the new program. Anyone with a brain knows he is lying.

Obama was in the Senate four years before being elected president and Democrats controlled both houses of Congress for two years before he won the White House.

Are we to believe they had a plan to save millions of dollars from Medicare and did not propose their legislation until this year? One wonders if they would have proposed their “savings” plan had McCain won the election. The truth is that they don’t know how to streamline Medicare and whatever health care bill they pass, will expand our deficit spending tremendously.

You could tell he was lying about not covering illegal immigrants because immigrant advocacy agencies are not protesting in the streets. You could tell he was lying about not funding abortions because abortion advocates are not protesting vehemently. In short, you could tell he was lying because his lips moved.

Obama has told us it is urgent to pass his health care coverage reforms this year. You could tell he was lying because the bill would not go into effect until 2013. How convenient is it that his urgent bill would not take effect until after his run for re-election. What he meant was that it was urgent to pass this expensive, budget busting intrusion into our freedoms, liberties and bank accounts before our next chance to take away Democrats’ control of Congress. After that, he wants the bill to take effect after the next presidential election so we won’t see the bill’s effects and take it out on him at the polls. It’s all about him and gaining control of our lives.

Some writers to this column are truly delusional. Because there are some programs in this country that could be described as socialistic, does not mean that we should continue and accelerate our slide into a full-blown socialistic country. There is a difference between a safety net of social programs to protect the least fortunate among us and giving government complete control of every aspect of our lives. The slide toward socialism should be stopped or reversed, not made total.

By the way, I am not going to quibble about whether Obama’s proposals are socialistic, fascist, Marxist or communistic. The fact that they are unAmerican is enough for me. We have the freedoms we do because millions of brave men and women fought and died to preserve the system our founders gave us. We should not let a bunch of leftists in Washington take those freedoms away from us without putting up a fight.

Randall Peabody
rural Defiance

Brown a good choice for township

Concerning the coming election Nov. 3 I wish to note that the majority of the population in Defiance is in Defiance Township.

As the past township trustees have served well, the communications among the city, county and township have not always been as good as they should have been. There is an individual running for township trustee that has pledged to work with all parties involved, and who I believe would be an inspiration to improving communications among the city, county and township.

I worked with Don Brown both as supervisor and co-worker at GM Powertrain. In our tenure together Don worked in the capacity of quality coordinator for several years. Don’s duties included liaison for labor/management, customer and suppliers within the Defiance plant as well as several sister plants throughout the division.

Based on my personal working relationship, Don Brown’s experience and training will make him an excellent Defiance Township trustee for the people of Defiance Township.

Larry Plummer
Defiance

Stimulating political incumbency

As Harvard’s president, Larry Summers, economist and former Treasury secretary, was a lion in a den of Daniels. The faculty Daniels, their tender feelings hurt by his occasional testiness, cowered together and declared him a meanie. Facing a faculty vote of no confidence, he resigned.



GEORGE WILL

Now he is Barack Obama’s principal economic adviser. So, weary of John Boehner, leader of House Republicans, dwelling on rising unemployment, Summers sent him a letter. In it he said, as Obama and his minions so consistently do, something that may be the text of this year’s White House Christmas card: At least we are not George Bush, so there. Summers said Obama “is committed to not repeating the fiscal mistakes of the last eight years.”

The letter, like its author, is trenchant and intelligent. He notes that job creation was much better during the eight Clinton years — an average of 225,000 per month — than between November 2001, the end of the

last recession, and December 2007, the beginning of this one, when the monthly average was just 94,000. And, Summers tartly reminds Boehner that in 2003 the Republican-controlled Congress passed a new prescription drug entitlement “that was not offset by either spending cuts or tax increases” and that in its first decade will cost more than \$1 trillion, including interest on the necessary borrowing.

But speaking of unfunded medical entitlements: The furrowed Washington brows that currently express faux puzzlement about how the new health care entitlement — aka “reform” — will be paid for are theatrical. There is no mystery. The new entitlement will be paid for, to a significant extent, the way much of government is paid for — by borrowing from China.

Republicans are operatic when they pretend to take seriously, in order to wax indignant about, the Democrats’ professed plan to partially pay for Sen. Max Baucus’ version of reform by cutting at least \$400 billion from Medicare. Supporters of the Baucus bill are guilty of many things, but not, regarding such cuts, of sincerity. Congress regularly vows to make Medicare cuts, and as regularly defers them.

Today, Washington routinely speaks of trillions, as in: This year’s trillion-dollar

deficit. And, the \$9 trillion in projected deficits over 10 years. And, the upward of \$1.8 trillion that Baucus’ “\$829 billion plan” would actually cost in the first 10 years (2014-23) in which its provisions would be fully operational. But the number from which Washington flinches is 999,999,999,997 less than a trillion. It is: 3.

Many Democrats believe that rising unemployment means the nation needs a “second” stimulus — but one they could call something other than a stimulus because it would be the third. The first was passed in February 2008, two months after the recession began. Its \$168 billion tax rebate failed to stimulate because overleveraged Americans perversely saved much of it.

Admitting that the first stimulus existed would complicate the task of justifying a third one, given that the second one — the \$787 billion extravaganza that galloped through Congress last February — has not been the success its advocates said it would be.

The administration predicted that if Stimulus II were passed, unemployment would not go above 8.5 percent. On CNN Feb. 9, Summers was asked how soon Americans would “feel results, the creation of jobs.” Summers answered, “You’ll see the effects begin almost immediately,”

starting with “layoffs that otherwise would have happened.” Summers’ formulation resembled various presidential statements, such as his goal “to create or save” 600,000 jobs in 100 days and up to four million jobs by 2010, and the statement that as of June, Stimulus II had “created and saved” 150,000 jobs.

Assertions that things would be much worse if Stimulus II had not been passed cannot be refuted because they are based on bald claims about numbers of jobs “saved.” Because those cannot be quantified, the assertions are unfalsifiable and analytically unhelpful. They are, perhaps, helpful to the administration by blurring the awkward fact that since Stimulus II was passed, the unemployment rate has risen from 8.1 percent to 9.8 percent, and probably soon will pass 10 percent.

But one-quarter of Stimulus II will be spent this year. Another quarter will be spent in 2011. Half will be spent in 2010, an election year. Which suggests that Stimulus II is, and Stimulus III would be, primarily designed to save a few dozen jobs — those of Democratic members of the House and Senate.

(George Will is a Pulitzer Prize winning columnist of The Washington Post Writers Group.)