

EDITOR'S NOTE — This is Part 2 of a two-part series dealing with the upcoming legislative session. Part 2 will address other issues facing the Legislature including the coal fired plant in Holcomb and other energy issues.

By EARL WATT

- Daily Leader

While the state's budget challenges will be the main priority for the upcoming legislative session, other issues still face the state.

The top of the list after the budget will be the coal plant in Holcomb, something that the governor thumbed down last year.

The additional coal plant would have been state of the art, possibly the cleanest coal plant in the nation. It would have brought a \$3.2 billion investment to southwest Kansas.

But the rejection due to carbon dioxide emissions, a gas that is not regulated by statute in Kansas, may have far-reaching consequences, according to Carl Holmes.

"Because of that ruling, we also lost a \$10 billion refinery in northeast Kansas," Holmes said. "That was about \$15 billion based on that decision. That means 4,000 to 5,000 construction jobs and 500 to 600 permanent jobs after completion. The construction jobs would have been there for four years."

Although it is uncertain what may be presented this legislative session to revive the plan, the threat of a veto from the governor is an almost certainty.

It takes 87 votes to override a governor's veto. Currently, the House is made up of 77

Republicans and 48 Democrats.

Some Democrats are in favor of the plan, but some Republicans oppose it, mostly those from the Lawrence and Wichita areas. Holmes was not sure if there would be enough votes to overcome a veto.

“Folks in Lawrence don’t want any carbon dioxide,” Holmes said.

However, Lawrence is serviced by coal-fired electricity, providing a low-cost energy source to that community. And the plant proposed at Holcomb would have been one of the cleanest in the nation.

While alternative energy sources need to be a part of the solution, Holmes said alternatives like wind cannot provide the only answer.

“I was driving to Wichita in July, and I drove by the wind farm,”

Holmes said. “Only 20 of the 170 turbines were running. I asked Florida Power and Light about this, and I found out those 20 weren’t generating electricity. They were just free wheeling. The person pointed out that in the peak of the day in the summertime, wind is only available 5 percent of the time. So you have to have something else 95 percent of the time in the peak and

heat of the day unless everyone wants to turn their air conditioners off in the summer and cut energy consumption.”

Holmes said he was supportive of wind as a part of the solution.

“Wind has its place,” he said. “But you have to have something else there in peak times when the wind isn’t blowing.”

As chair of the Energy and Utilities Commission, Holmes will be addressing the issue with his committee members prior to the start of the legislative session to formulate a strategy.

GAMBLING

Although four state casinos were approved, only one is still moving forward. The other three have been canceled.

Dodge City's casino is still advancing, but Holmes said the other three have been suspended.

Sebelius was planning on casino revenues to fund certain aspects of state government "She wanted to spend \$200 million of that to pay bonds off and build a pharmacy school at Wichita State," Holmes said. "The Legislature fought against that saying it was not positive that money would be coming in. Looking back, the Legislature was correct. Today, there is one casino being built, the rest have backed out."