

OPINION

THE HUTCHINSON NEWS

Editorial Board

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EDITORIAL

A starting point

While some downplayed Pope Benedict XVI's nodding approval of the use of condoms for certain circumstances, an American Roman Catholic priest was more ebullient in his assessment of the church's altered stance. "This is a game-changer," the Rev. James Martin, a prominent Jesuit writer and editor, told The Associated Press. The pope, in a lengthy interview conducted in July and finally released last week, said the use of condoms is preferable over the risk of one person with HIV infecting another. Abstinence, though, remains the pope's preferred method of choice in such situations. Yet his comments opened the door slightly to a much broader and needed discussion in the Roman Catholic community. That point was underscored by a Vatican spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi. "The point is to take a step towards responsibility, to take into consideration the risk of the life of the person with whom you have

relations whether it's a man, woman or transsexual." Lombardi said during a press conference. Some think the pope's comments on condoms targeted Africa, where AIDS is rampant and where the church would like to acquire more members. As either a coincidence or a well-timed maneuver, the Vatican released the pope's interview on the same day United Nations' AIDS officials credited condom use as the reason for a significant decline in HIV cases. The pope's slightly altered views – whether a game-changer or simply a way to stir discussion in the Catholic community – are a positive step forward. They allow Catholics who either were troubled by or disagreed with the church's stance on condom use a platform for discussion. More pointedly, the church's mission always has centered on saving lives. Using a condom to prevent infecting one's partner with HIV seems a logical component of that life-saving mission.

WESTERN FRONT

A matter of allegiance

Your Nov. 14 editorial considers the question, "Can Muslims be good Americans and still be good Muslims?" You point out that the question could as well be asked regarding good subjects of any religion, and the answer would be "no" because "the subject's first allegiance must always be to that religion's God." Your analysis is helpful, and your conclusion correct. The ultimate religious or political question is one and the same – who is my head ruler? Who has final authority as my lawgiver, judge and king? Who will protect and provide for me? Living with dual allegiance brings conflict. We can't serve two masters.

can states, Germany and Iraq. Jesus did not express judgment when relating to those who had given allegiance to Rome. I do not wish to judge my Christian brothers and sisters who have given allegiance to governments of this world. I simply invite them to consider whether there is a better alternative. I have chosen to live in God's kingdom and to give my exclusive allegiance to his elected king, Jesus of Nazareth. I choose not to give allegiance to any other government. May our common creator and his Prince of Peace enable all of us to live in peace.

JOHN STEWARD-OF-JESUS IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD
 Hutchinson

No friend to America

Godfather of the progressive movement, billionaire George Soros of The Open Society Institute is silently trying to destabilize the American democracy. Hiding behind well-financed front organizations, this Judas, who as a youth during World War II assisted in confiscating property of fellow Jews (as revealed in a 1998 "60 Minutes" interview), hides his nefarious financial empire offshore to avoid the scrutiny of U.S. financial regulators. He will use any means necessary to reshape the world in his own twisted, left-wing image. With billions of dollars and insidious fifth-column maneuverings, Soros is attempting to encircle independent media outlets and replace the truth with his progressive "one world" dogma. What happens to those who stray from Soros' path? Ask Juan William, formerly of National Public Radio. Using mouthpieces like the Huffington Post, Soros is relentlessly moving toward the destruction of our core American values. Unfortunately, Mr. Soros has run into a problem; fearlessly, Glenn Beck of Fox News is exposing this elitist socialist in his insidious plot to reshape our nation and the world in his own distorted, godless image. If Mr. Soros is successful in his endeavor, hopefully we will receive better treatment than he gave his fellow Hungarian Jews 65 years ago.

GREGORY H. BONTRAGER
 Hutchinson

JOIN THE DISCUSSION

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call to verify the letter. We strive to publish letters within one week of verification. There is a 30-day waiting period between submissions. Western Front letters are subject to editing for space considerations and libel concerns. (2) Respond directly to a newspaper editorial by joining our online opinions blog. Go to www.hutchnews.com/editorialblogs and comment on any of our latest posts. A selection of constructive comments may be excerpted to go with opinions that are published in a later print edition of The News.



COLUMNISTS

EPA will make sure law is followed

BY KARL BROOKS
 Guest columnist

The Sunflower coal-burning power plant controversy has been divisive, complicated and long-running. Five years on, you can pick a fight by backing or opposing the biggest coal-fired plant proposed for this nation. Each branch of state government – the Legislature, two governors, every level of the state courts – has weighed in. Tens of thousands of Kansans have gone on record for and against permitting Sunflower's construction. Me, too! When I was teaching history and law at the University of Kansas, four years before I took the oath of office to lead EPA in this region, I testified that Kansas had to use a fair, transparent state permitting process to base any decision on law and science. EPA has not yet been party to the Sunflower controversy. That's as it should be. Our U.S. Constitution shares federal and state responsibility to protect our nation's air resource. Our keystone Clean Air Act assigns Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) initial responsibility to decide if Sunflower's pollutants will damage Kansans' health too much. But EPA will soon have to make some important legal decisions. And recent developments in Topeka and Washington, D.C., warrant a brief explanation of this agency's duties if the Sunflower controversy hits my desk. You probably know that on Elec-

tion Day, Kansas Gov. Mark Parkinson abruptly removed Rod Bremby, the state's top environmental-protection official. It's fair to say these two did not see eye to eye on Sunflower: Bremby denied its permit in 2007 and Parkinson reversed that decision in 2009. You also should know that this nation's air-quality laws are changing at the same time a new governor takes the reins in Topeka. In January 2011, the biggest new coal-burning pollution sources will have to limit climate-changing emissions for the first time.



BROOKS

How do these changes – political and legal, state and federal – affect EPA's work on Sunflower? Rest assured, EPA's Sunflower decisions in the coming months will reflect enduring legal principles, not shifting political winds. Both Kansas and EPA agree: Sunflower would burn so much coal that a state permit issued after Jan. 2 must impose greenhouse-gas controls. Even Kansas leaders who back Sunflower concede that national law governs state permits. While Kansas is amending its air-quality laws to control greenhouse gases, EPA and KDHE are cooperating to make sure applicants proposing new energy projects can still seek needed permits. A good example of federal-state

partnership, this "backstop" shows why the Clean Air Act, now 40 years old, works so well. Personnel changes at KDHE don't change EPA's responsibilities, but they do highlight Kansas' duty, under our system of government, to show its Sunflower decisions are fair, transparent and consistent with the law. If KDHE recommends Sunflower be permitted before Jan. 2, EPA will review this initial decision by asking three important questions: • First, does the Kansas permit include public-health protection standards required by sound science and federal law? • Second, did Kansas operate all parts of its permitting process as required by the Clean Air Act? • And finally, does a Sunflower permit satisfy public confidence in the impartiality and transparency of Kansas' system of safeguarding air quality? Kansas' air permitting law gives all three branches of state government important work, and also invites the people of the state to participate. That's why EPA must scrutinize not just the language of any Sunflower permit, but the whole state decision-making process that produced a permit. EPA has advised Kansas leaders of their duties many times. And Kansans should rest assured that this agency will make sure the rule of law has been faithfully enforced. Karl Brooks is the EPA administrator for region 7, which includes Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska and nine Tribal nations.

Tea party complications

WASHINGTON – In American revolutions, power generally flows to moderate revolutionaries. Sam Adams may get things started, but it is John who gets things done. With more than 80 freshmen House Republicans ready to demolish the Capitol but unable to find its washrooms, influence will shift to leaders (think Eric Cantor, Paul Ryan and Tom Price) who possess both tea party credibility and governing experience. Their mix of boldness and discretion will determine much about the outcome of the conservative uprising of 2010. They have a serious, intricate plan – in which much can go wrong. First, House Republicans will produce a shock-and-awe budget, rolling back federal spending to 2008 levels – undoing a 24 percent increase in discretionary spending. Ryan will set the overall targets. Appropriators will abandon scalpels for cleavers. The goal is reset the political clock – to produce a pre-Obama budget. Given the tightness of the budget squeeze, many interest groups will squeal, and some of the squealing will be justified. But the stakes of this Republican exercise are relatively low. There is no chance a House Republican budget would be approved by the Senate or signed by President Obama. The purpose is to indicate Republican seriousness to tea party voters and to dramatize the large expansion of government during the short Obama era. The likely outcome of a budget conflict with Democrats is a continuing resolution freezing federal spending at 2010 levels, perhaps with a small, across-the-board reduction. Second, House Republicans will pursue a broad offensive against Obama's health care reform. Given the election outcome and public



Michael Gerson

polling on the issue, Republicans are feeling no fear or hesitation. The House will vote for repeal – which, once again, will go nowhere with the Senate or the president. So Republicans will try to block funding for the implementation of health care reform. And they are planning a series of high-profile oversight hearings to highlight the current and likely effects of Obamacare: premium increases, new burdens on state budgets and a higher-than-expected "dumping rate" as employers push their workers into the public health system. The objective here is to make the case for eventual repeal before most of the public subsidies go into effect in 2014, which would entrench the system. Third, some House leaders want to begin laying the foundation for entitlement reform, since large, unfunded entitlement commitments are the main cause of the American fiscal crisis. But this approach splits the Republican conference, with some members asserting it is premature and politically damaging. Even supporters of raising the issue think in incremental terms. "We are not at the austerity stage yet," one House member told me. "We still have time to change on our own terms." The hope of entitlement-reform advocates is to spend two years preparing the public – demonstrating that scaling back benefits is possible without removing the safety net, building al-

liances with centrist Democrats and ensuring that the 2012 Republican presidential candidate is supportive. To some Americans, this agenda will seem ambitious. To others, it may seem frightening. But House leaders believe their main risk is appearing too timid to their own members. Even if this three-part strategy proceeds with efficiency and success, in two years it will result in a budget freeze, an unsuccessful guerrilla campaign against health reform, and the bare beginnings of the entitlement debate. Will tea party revolutionaries view this as victory? Will they be tempted by the Ross Perot option – a third-party movement that would increase the odds of Obama's re-election? One test of Republican strategy will come early. At some point from March to May, the federal government will require the authority to borrow more money. House Republican leaders will try to use a vote on increasing the debt limit to secure concessions from the Obama administration. But some newly elected Republicans may oppose increasing the limit under any circumstances. What tea party candidate was elected to add to the debt? The problem is, as one House Republican told me, "If we don't raise the limit, we are Argentina." So would John Boehner, the likely new speaker, be forced to go to House Democrats for support? How would that play among the Sam Adamses of the revolution, already suspicious of Boehner as an "establishment" figure? There are always compromises in governing. But they are harder to make when one element of a political coalition views compromise itself as the problem. Michael Gerson's e-mail address is michaelgerson@washpost.com.

Doonesbury

