

## **WTE column of November 18, 2015: “Let’s trade coal for hemp” CST of November 22: “How can Wyoming generate jobs?”**

Sometimes people ask what we can do to help Wyoming divest itself of fossil-fuel industries and commerce. How to generate jobs replacing those lost in oil and gas fields and coal mines? Occasionally the question is put facetiously: before I can answer, the inquirer explains how and why we’d never be able to do it. Still, the subject deserves serious discussion.

Our first order of business must be to disabuse ourselves of the notion that the current “bust” will be followed by a “boom.” Today’s bust may well be the new normal. It’s possible Wyoming will never get back to the good old days—which, let’s be honest, were good only for the few.

If we once discarded a mindset of boom-to-bust-and-back-again, we could get down to conceptualizing alternatives. Alternatives do exist, though human lethargy and powerful financial interests wish to maintain the status quo.

In Wyoming, fracking has been going on at frenetic pace, even though, for a number of reasons (not all of them “green”) consumers are more sparing in the use these commodities than they were in the past. A strong El Nino suggests that the coming winter will be mild. That’s bad news for natural-gas regulations on flaring: there’s no incentive to cut down on the practice, but the same problems exist in other countries.

“Norway turns from oil to tech,” read the headline of a lengthy article in a recent issue of USA Today, with a side bar of, “Educational tools could help remedy nation’s economic turbulence.” Norway is a country of five million and the article, accompanied by photos of young schoolchildren working with electronic tablets the size of large calculators, highlights that country’s success in attracting and retaining technical start-up firms and innovative individuals.

Wyoming could do worse than take a page from Norway’s book.

Another job-creating approach, which I highlighted during a recent presentation in Casper, is to go after fossil-fuel companies that have neglected their contractual obligations to undertake remediation and restore the land from which they profited. The state of Wyoming could collaborate in, e.g., reseeding, planting trees, and plugging orphaned wells, by financing a portion of the costs with the understanding that local labor would be used in lieu of bringing in contractual workers. To be sure, extractive companies are singing the blues about falling profits, yet these conglomerates are fabulously wealthy. There’s no reason not to hold their feet to the fire.

Another of my ideas concerns informed decisions on the agricultural products of hemp and medical marijuana. I have lobbied various Wyoming legislators on this. My wheat farm has been laid fallow, and I know hemp cultivation would restore its productivity.

“Legal cannabis is the fastest-growing industry in the United States,” writes Steve DeAngelo in his just-published “The Cannabis Manifesto,” citing [www.arcviewmarketresearch.com](http://www.arcviewmarketresearch.com) to substantiate this astonishing assertion. The book’s glowing introduction is provided by a former San Francisco mayor.

The author references several bills making their way through Congress. “Thus far, other than Farr-Rohrabacher (see below), only one cannabis reform bill has made it through both houses and been signed by the President,” he adds. “The Industrial Hemp Research Amendment authorized cultivation of hemp for research purposes and set the stage for a revival of a commercial hemp industry that could revolutionize the way we produce plastic, paper, fuel, and textiles.”

The history of hemp in the US dates to colonial times. In January 1619, Jamestown, VA, passed a law ordering all farmers to grow hemp. In 1765, George Washington commented on his hemp production. In 1791, Thomas Jefferson wrote in his farm journal about his hemp crop, noting that “the best hemp and the best tobacco grow in the same kind of soil.” The US Census of 1850 shows 8,327 hemp plantations in the South, with a minimum of 2,000 acres each.

In 1916, the USDA issued a bulletin, “An acre of hemp produces four times as much paper as trees.” In 1941, Henri Ford unveiled his Hemp Car. In 1944, the US government began its “Hemp for Victory” campaign.

But in 1970, President Nixon signed the Controlled Substances Act, which makes no distinction between hemp and marijuana. Based on an irrational and outdated policy, American farmers and indigenous peoples alike have suffered decades of being denied the right to grow hemp. Now the tide is turning. Close to half of the states have implemented or introduced corrective action. Texas and Wyoming might be next.

The above-mentioned Farr-Rohrabacher Amendment, aka the “Respect State Medical Cannabis Law Act,” passed in December 2014, a bi-partisan budget measure prohibiting the Department of Justice from spending funds to block implementation of state medical-cannabis laws. See a follow-up column on recent developments regarding medical cannabis that could affect Wyoming.