

Coal-fired power plants

The writing on the wall

BOULDER, COLORADO

Only green compromises will allow them to survive

THE coal-fired power plant that was cancelled in Michigan on May 1st is the 97th to be rejected since 2001, and the ninth this year. The number of planned coal plants across America has plummeted from 150 to 60 in the past five years. Last year 5,465 megawatts (MW) of new electricity were announced, but more than twice that capacity—12,572MW, according to Edison Electric Institute, which represents the electricity industry—was subtracted because of cancellations or delays. The nine coal plants cancelled this year alone, Edison notes ruefully, would have provided about 6,650MW of power, or enough to heat almost 5m homes.

Environmentalists, though thrilled, know they still have a long way to go. The Energy Information Administration reports that more than 600 coal-fired plants still produce about half of America's power and will still produce 47% of it in 2030. But the government has pledged to slash greenhouse-gas emissions by 80% by 2050. "If the [planned] coal plants don't get derailed, President Obama won't be able to cut greenhouse gas emissions in the next four years," says Bruce Nilles, who heads the Sierra Club's anti-coal campaign.

At least the Environmental Protection Administration (EPA), in a complete reversal from its role under the Bush administration, is doing its best for the cause. On April 27th it withdrew an air-quality permit it had issued for a 1,500MW pulverised coal-fired power plant, called Desert Rock, which was to be built on Navajo Nation land in New Mexico. In effect, this pulled the plug on the enterprise. That ruling was the first public consequence of an EPA mandate, issued on April 17th, that the most harmful heat-trapping greenhouse gases were a threat to public health and welfare and a cause of global warming. The mandate gives Barack Obama *carte blanche* to regulate the power industry.

Among the utility companies feeling the heat is NV Energy, which is postponing plans for a \$5 billion, 1,500MW coal plant in eastern Nevada. Instead, it will harvest the state's plentiful solar and other renewable resources. Farther north, Southern Montana Electric Generation and Transmission Co-operative says "regulatory un-

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Jack Kemp

Conservative hero

WASHINGTON, DC

A liberal Republican in the best sense

WINSTON CHURCHILL once said that he "preferred the past to the present and the present to the future". Jack Kemp had exactly the opposite point of view. For him the future always promised to be better than both the present and the past—provided that the government would just get out of the way.

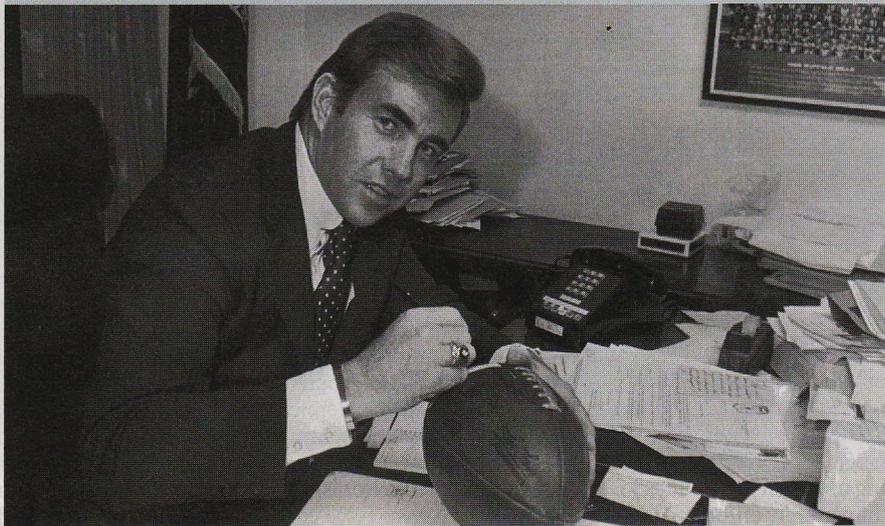
Mr Kemp was one of the most prominent Republicans of his generation. He was secretary of housing and urban development under the first George Bush. He thought of running for the Republican nomination in 1996 and became Bob Dole's running-mate. But his real influence was ideological. He was a tireless advocate of supply-side economics: the man who persuaded Ronald Reagan to abandon deficit-hawk Republicanism in favour of aggressive tax cuts.

Mr Kemp started his career as a wiry, eager quarterback for the Buffalo Bills, before riding his popularity as a sports star to a seat in Congress. There he was consumed by a vision of how to make

the world better. He lent his name to the Kemp-Roth tax cuts of 1981, one of the opening salvos of the Reagan revolution, and championed school vouchers, enterprise zones and housing vouchers.

The traditional wing of the party thought him a blow-dried wonder, but he could give as good as he got. In 1985 Bob Dole mocked him for wanting "a business deduction for hairspray". Mr Kemp shot back: "In a recent fire, Bob Dole's library burned down. Both books were lost. And he hadn't even finished colouring one of them."

Mr Kemp's world view was shaped by three things. Sympathy for the blacks he had got to know as a football player; contempt for urban liberalism, which he had seen at work in Buffalo, with its blighted housing estates and failed schools; and his commitment to supply-side economics. He never lost his enthusiasm for cutting taxes and expanding opportunities: virtues he had learnt as a not-so-dumb jock.

**Political savvy learnt from football**

certainties" have forced it to defer plans for its 250MW Highwood coal plant near Great Falls. It proposes to build a smaller, cleaner-burning, natural-gas power station, as well as a previously announced 9MW wind farm. And several power companies are planning to convert older coal-burning plants to run on biomass, such as woody forest waste.

Renewable resources can't yet begin to replace coal as providers of power. But a deal struck in Kansas on May 4th, ending 19 months of impasse between Sunflower

Electric Power corporation and the state government, shows under what conditions coal may be able to survive. Two coal-fired plants had been planned by Sunflower. It will now build just one, which will use new clean technology, offset carbon dioxide emissions and develop wind energy on the side. In return, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment cannot impose any greenhouse-gas regulations that are tougher than those emerging from Washington. Suddenly, that seems a pretty high bar. ■