

SSC poses threat to environment

The Department of Energy (DOE), which has already created numerous Texas-sized radioactive wastelands, is now hell-bent on creating yet another — this one in Texas. Two weeks ago, the Senate took \$75 million appropriated for cleaning up the nation's atomic weapons complex and spent it on the Superconducting Super Collider (SSC).

The SSC is a high-energy physics research project being built in Waxahachie. In the SSC, two beams of protons will be accelerated to 20 trillion electron volts each, and then smashed into each other to search for the sub-atomic building blocks of matter.

The SSC design requires a 54-mile circumference underground tunnel ten feet in diameter. In selecting an appropriate SSC site, however, the DOE has bulldozed the truth around more than it has earth and rock.

The DOE geological evaluation used to determine an SSC site stated quite falsely that the Austin Chalk in Ellis County is impermeable and homogeneous, when in fact, it's unstable, extensively fractured and well watered. Stephen Pierce, a geologist and Ellis County resident, says an unstable shale layer in the Chalk and other faults and fractures make it nearly impossible to predict how tunneling will change the natural water flow.

The DOE's record at Fermilab, the United States' largest existing accelerator, does not bode well for the SSC. At Fermilab, hazardous spills are being cleaned up, and two possible Superfund sites are under investigation. The SSC is 12 times larger and 20 times more powerful than the Fermi accelerator, and even more importantly, is in closer proximity to residents' homes than Fermilab — directly under Mr. Pierce's home in the current SSC layout.

Ionizing nuclear radiation produced by accelerators like the SSC and Fermilab is a serious problem. Of particular concern are tritium and sodium-22, both of which are leachable from soils and soluble in water.

At Fermilab, tritiated water was found 22 feet below a supposedly "impervious" liner, and in surface water at levels up to 6.4 times the allowable limit. The DOE denies that the SSC poses a radioactive threat, yet is condemning 155 water wells near the SSC.

The DOE's radiation protection criteria specify that facilities be designed for 20 percent of the permissible radiation level. For drinking water, the limit is four millirems (a radiation unit) per year. Twenty percent of four mrem/yr is 0.8 mrem/year. Disturbingly, the DOE is designing the SSC for the full four mrem/yr, supporting residents' fears that the SSC can't be built safely.

In addition to the SSC's radioactive contamination of ground and surface water, there is the problem of radioactive waste storage, euphemistically called "disposal" or "management."

The DOE claims Fermilab's radiation comes primarily from a fixed-target program which the SSC will not have. However, both the July 1990 SSC Site-Specific Design report and an August 1990 SSC environmental report indicate fixed-target programs as potential areas for SSC expansion.

The radiation detectors at Fermilab are inadequate for the large energy lev-

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Columnist

els and beam intensities to be used in the SSC. The SSC's large number of experimental magnets (over 10,000) and beam definers dictate more beam losses than occur at smaller accelerators. The beam loss irradiates beam line components, electronic modules and tunnel equipment, creating "low-level" radioactive waste.

Direct human evidence now strongly supports the recognition that cancer risk is probably more severe per dose-unit at low doses than at moderate and high doses. This means that radioactive waste like that produced at the SSC poses a serious health threat despite its "low-level" radiation intensity. Distinguished health physicist John Gofman says, "Now that we know the hazard of low-dose radiation, the crime is not experimentation — it's murder."

However, it's not environmental impact, but cost that will likely stop the SSC. About \$1.7 billion of necessary foreign funding is not materializing. One magnet redesign has already increased the SSC's cost. The collider's projected cost two years ago was \$5.9 billion. The current official guesstimate is \$8.3 billion, but DOE official Joseph Cipriano admitted to Congress in May that the SSC could cost \$9.1 billion, and one independent DOE estimate was \$11.8 billion.

U.S. Rep. Sherwood Boehlert says the DOE's cost estimates change "by the hour, depending on whose talking," and calls the DOE's responses to his concerns "clever evasions, wishful thinking, broken promises and outright lies."

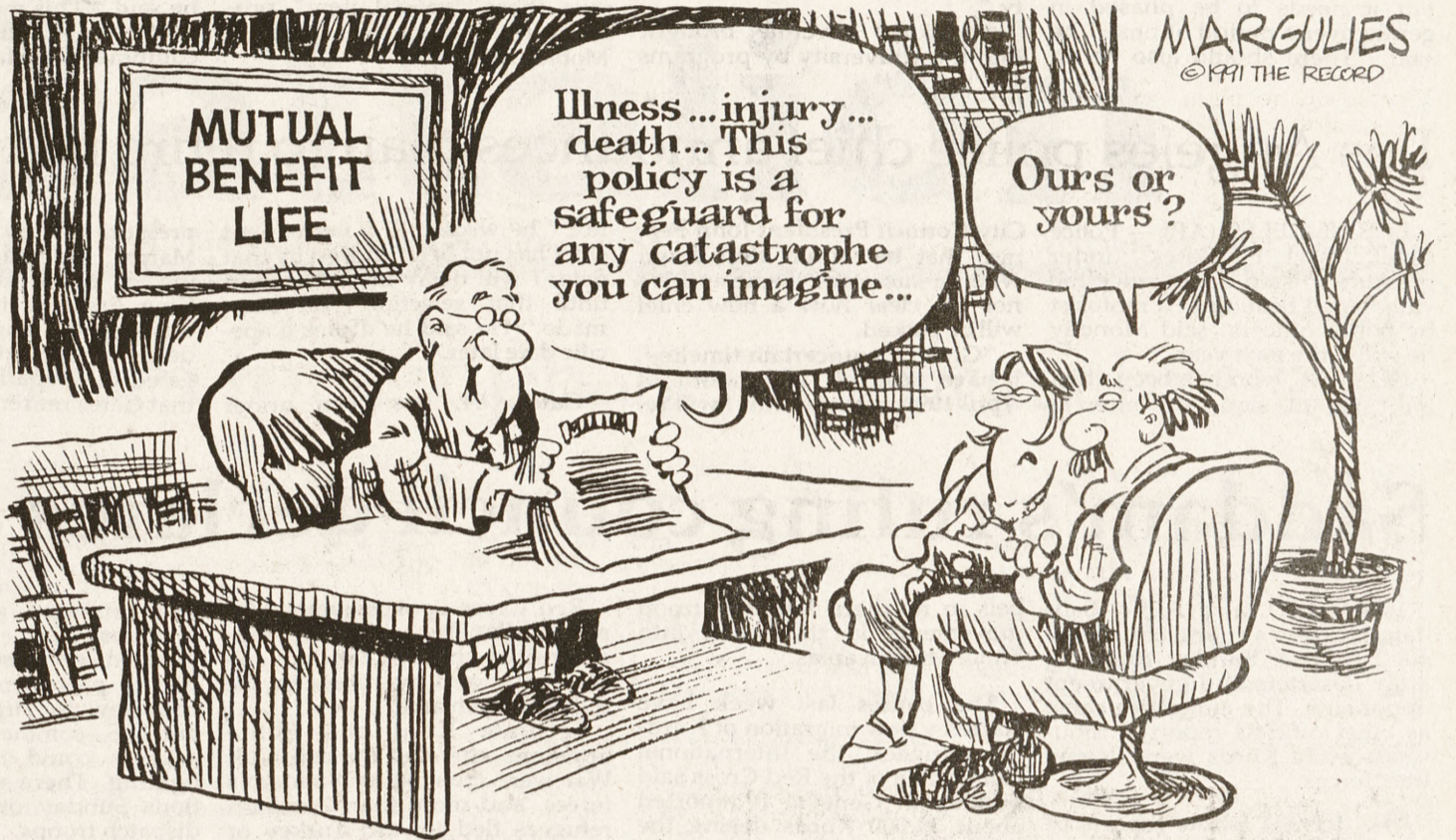
Rep. Joe Barton's behavior mirrors the DOE's. Barton's recent June 1991 newsletter claims the "SSC is under budget and ahead of schedule." This taxpayer-financed promotional material, which leads with an article "BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT: NOW IS THE TIME," does not mention whether it's the \$8.3 or \$9.1 or \$11.8 billion SSC which is "under budget."

SSC boosters quickly point to the positive technology spin-offs from SSC magnet research. However, these can be achieved without the enormous expense of digging a huge hole in the Austin Chalk, and mass-producing (itself a technological challenge) and aligning over 10,000 superconducting magnets.

The SSC was inspired by a quest for knowledge, but has been kept alive only through power politics. Dozens of SSC-related research grants have been given to institutions all across the United States to garner necessary congressional support. Potential Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) military applications have captured President Bush's support for the not-so-scientifically pure SSC.

There's even more quark-barrel politics behind the SSC boondoggle, like the treatment of residents displaced by the SSC. Clearly, though, we need to pull the plug (powered by the shoddily built Comanche Peak nuclear power plant) on this costly and dangerous proton subway.

Michael Worsham is a graduate student in environmental engineering.



Helms' HIV disclosure law: Why stop with doctors?

This past Thursday, the U.S. Senate overwhelmingly adopted an amendment that would force any health-care worker afflicted with the AIDS virus to disclose his illness to his patients, otherwise risking a mandatory prison term or a \$10,000 fine. North Carolina Sen. Jesse Helms sponsored the amendment in response to an angry letter from a young woman who might have been infected with the deadly virus by her dentist.

On its surface, this politically popular legislation seems like an appropriate precaution. However, I do not feel that the law goes far enough. Instead, what we need are policies that protect the general public from any person with AIDS who treats us in any way. Following the Senate's logic, I propose that the federal government require all hairdressers and barbers to inform their customers if they become stricken with the deadly syndrome.

Think about it. Do our hair care specialists not wield sharp instruments that occasionally nick unsuspecting customers? And aren't a significant proportion of male hairdressers gay? With feminine names like Ramone and Mario could they be anything but gay? And as we all know, gay men are most likely to be the ones infected with the AIDS virus.

Just because we haven't documented an AIDS-causing hairdresser doesn't mean it hasn't happened. In fact, it doesn't matter if we have or not, because, the Senate passed its strict regulations on doctors and den-

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Columnist

tists without any such definite evidence either.

And whereas medical surgical staffs are thoroughly scrubbed, double-gloved, wearing facial protection, protective sanitized clothing and masks,

"Damn the notions of privacy and civil liberties, we're worried about public health! And while were at it, damn the consequences! So what if perfectly able-bodied hairdressers lose their livelihoods? The same thing could happen to physicians and nurses."

our barbers don't use ANY protective measures. Oh sure, they may clean their scissors and razors, but do they sanitize them in an autoclave?

Even this columnist will admit that the chance of a hairdresser transmitting the AIDS virus is slim, but it doesn't matter. Helms offered the amendment for physicians even though it is extremely unlikely that health-care workers will give their patients AIDS. Of the 182,000 persons

known to be afflicted with the virus, only five are even suspected of acquiring the disease from a single dentist. In percentage terms, only three thousandths of one percent of all known AIDS patients could have gotten the virus from a health-care professional.

I suppose it would be necessary to force all beauticians to submit for AIDS testing because disclosure requirements might induce some to avoid any bad news. Damn the notions of privacy and civil liberties, we're worried about public health! And while were at it, damn the consequences! So what if perfectly able-bodied hairdressers lose their livelihoods? Who cares if they can't find work? The same thing could happen to physicians and nurses. Buck up Mario!

Just to be sure, it would be helpful if the coiffeurs could test their customers for AIDS so that they could protect themselves, and their customers. But nurses and paramedics can't do it, why should we let grandma's hairdresser get a special break?

We are so lucky to have senators like Helms to protect us. In their infinite wisdom they have created legislation that will surely solve the AIDS crisis in this country. If they would only introduce my idea on the Senate floor, I know it would sail right through to a vote without debate. Why would anyone vote against such a pragmatic piece of legislation?

If this idea flies, I've got another great idea to solve a major public problem. It begins with testing the intelligence levels of our congressmen ...

Trey Jacobson is a graduate student in public administration.

MAIL CALL

The Battalion is interested in hearing from its readers and welcomes all letters to the editor. Please include name, classification, address and phone number on all letters. The editor reserves the right to edit letters for style and length. There is no guarantee letters will appear. Letters may be brought to 216 Reed McDonald, sent to Campus Mail Stop 1111 or can be faxed to 845-5408.

Worsham's views shared

EDITOR:
I am a recently hired faculty member, and I picked up a Battalion today for the first time. I would like to respond to Gary P. Carroll's letter to the editor which addresses Battalion columnist Michael Worsham. At the close of his letter, Carroll intimates that Worsham's views will be shared by, or be meaningful to, few in the A&M community: "It is admirable, but I think your words may be falling upon deaf ears. Preach your ideals to those who will listen and with action, and a lot of luck, you may see results. But put them in The Battalion, and you will see opposition."

I disagree. Although I have read only one of Mr. Worsham's columns ("Aggies should seek out other media" July 17, 1991), and the response to an earlier column which outlines his views, from this evidence I feel he is an alternative voice in The Battalion and on the A&M campus.

I look forward to reading subsequent columns by Mr. Worsham and offer my continued readership as one indication of support in the A&M community for his views.

Lynne Vallone

Milk Cartons of the '80s:
(Courtesy of the FBI)

MARGULIES
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Milk Cartons of the '90s:
(Courtesy of U.S. Census Bureau)

