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MICHIANA POINT OF VIEW/JOSEPH MILLER

Site, transportation pose problems for nuclear waste

The Tribune's March 12 editorial ("Doing nothing poses greatest risk") encourages Congress to support President Bush's recent decision to transport nuclear waste (i.e., spent nuclear fuel) from reactors around the country to Yucca Mountain, Nev. I disagree.

Nuclear waste should not be moved until the technology and preparations for transporting such waste are improved, and until a safe, centralized long-term solution for storing such waste is available. Yucca Mountain is not that solution.

Miller

Current estimates are that transportation of nuclear waste to Yucca Mountain will involve 100,000 truck and rail shipments over a 30-year period. Such shipments will go through 43 states and occur within a half mile of 50 million residents. Current estimates are that 210 to 354 accidents can be expected during the 100,000 shipments.

How bad these accidents will be depends in part upon the adequacy of the truck and rail casks used to transport the spent fuel. Unfortunately all casks currently in use are designed only to withstand a 30 mph crash and half-hour fire at a temperature of 1,475 degrees. Because many accidents exceed these standards, significant releases of radioactivity are likely.

The Baltimore rail tunnel fire last July, for instance, reached estimated temperatures of 1,800 degrees and burned for more than three days, according to a report in the Baltimore Sun. If rail casks containing spent nuclear fuel had been involved in the fire, large numbers of people and large areas of the environment would have been exposed to high levels of radiation.

How bad accidents will be also depends upon how well trained and well equipped emergency personnel are in the 43 states that will experience the 100,000 shipments. Most are neither trained nor equipped to deal with radiological emergencies. Accidents are not the only threat. According to a report in the Las Vegas Sun and U.S. Army tests, at least some types of casks could be severely damaged by terrorists using a commonly available anti-tank missile. High level nuclear waste needs to be isolated from the environment for hundreds of thousands of years. Yucca Mountain is unacceptable as a repository because:

- The rock in the mountain is highly fractured due to frequent earthquakes. According to the Nuclear Information and Resource Services (NIRS), for instance, more than 600 earthquakes of magnitude 2.5 or greater have occurred within 50 miles of the site during the last 25 years. In 1992, a 5.6 level quake occurred just 12 miles from the site.
- Rather than taking thousands of years for rainwater to reach the proposed repository as previously predicted, rainwater was recently found that was only 40 years old.
- A magnitude 5 or 6 earthquake at the site could dramatically raise the water table below the site, flooding the repository and creating a rapid corrosive breakdown of the metal disposal canisters and possible steam explosion. Either event would allow radioactivity to leak through the fractures to the aquifer beneath the site (which serves Las Vegas) and to the atmosphere.
- In addition to the above and many other geological inadequacies, Yucca Mountain is also legally unacceptable. More specifically, according to the Ruby Valley Treaty of 1863, as reported by Public Citizen's Critical Mass Energy and Environment Project (CMEP), the Western Shoshone Nation holds title to Yucca Mountain. The Western Shoshone Nation is opposed to using the mountain as a nuclear waste repository.
- The federal government clearly needs to fund a massive program to develop safe technologies for the transportation and long-term storage of high-level nuclear waste. The safest strategy for long-term storage is likely to be above ground, retrievable, permanently-monitored storage as implied in a National Academy of Sciences report in August 2001, rather than irreversible deep burial as currently proposed. Although The Tribune editorial doesn't call for a phase-out of nuclear power, nuclear power should be phased out as rapidly as possible. Continued operation of nuclear reactors creates the risk of catastrophic accidents. We should be mindful of the testimony given by the chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to a Congressional Subcommittee on April 17, 1985, that the probability of a core meltdown in a domestic nuclear reactor in the United States during the next 30 years is 45 percent. Continued operation of nuclear reactors also creates more nuclear waste, and all the additional problems associated with the on-site storage, transportation and ultimate off-site long-term storage of this waste. The continued operation of nuclear reactors also perpetuates all the problems associated with the mining and milling of uranium — problems borne disproportionately by Native American populations.

Reactors, spent fuel storage pools at reactor sites, truck and train shipments of nuclear waste and long-term storage facilities are all potential terrorist targets. Numerous individuals (e.g., Harvey Wasserman, Matt Bivens) and groups (e.g., the Union of Concerned Scientists, NIRS and CMEP) have offered constructive suggestions for reducing the vulnerability of the entire nuclear cycle to terrorism. Utilities and the federal government should heed their advice.

Safe, economical, secure, job-producing, community-enhancing, sustainable alternatives such as energy efficiency, co-generation, load management and diverse renewables (wind, solar, biomass, hydrogen) are readily available and/or are rapidly being developed. Don't we owe it to present and future generations, and the biosphere, to embrace them?

Joseph Miller is an associate professor in the Psychology Department at Saint Mary's College. He lives in Mishawaka.

AP file photo

Workers gather at the tunnel entrance of the Yucca Mountain project in Nevada in May 2000 to begin the day's work.

THE WRITER'S ART
JAMES J. KILPATRICK

Syntax is something to blink at

Some months ago a curious reader addressed an inquiry to The Miami Herald: "To help us observe our Islamic faith, will you please identify the foods containing pork served by the Miami-Dade County public schools?"

The Herald helpfully replied: "Meals that include pork ingredients in Broward are pork rib patties, hot dogs, pork chopettes, and ham, although this last item can be made from pork or turkey."

The notion that honest-to-goodness ham can be made from turkey is a notion known in newspaper city rooms as a blinker. It is something to blink about. A few Horrid Examples will flutter your eyelids.

A book reviewer for The Indianapolis Star praised "Body of Secrets" by James Banford. "The author vividly refreshes memories of Cold War tensions and the dangers, many of them fatal for people who lived through them." Those fatal dangers are risky, no doubt about that.

James J. Kilpatrick — Universal Press Syndicate.

The Kappa Sigma fraternity last year called attention to some of its members' newly published books, among them a book called "Rural Rehabilitation." The publisher was excited. The book "is one of the most exciting and challenging service delivery for physicians, allied health professionals, rural and urban planners, among others." Another publisher described "Freddie the Sky Pilot" by Charles Pickrell. "This is an entertaining autobiography of the author's life, including the romancing of a beautiful girl, who later became his wife growing up on a farm near Phoenix." Those commas all belonged to the Blurber.

There is no sure way for writers to avoid blinkers. These sins are usually sins of syntax — the misplaced phrase, the elusive antecedent, the accidentally omitted word.

In March of last year The New York Times editorially noted the end of a long Bull market and the beginning of a bear market. Over the preceding 12 months investors had lost $4 trillion in paper wealth. The Times had a portentous question: "How deep and lasting will the ongoing slowdown turn out?" Knows who?

In Columbus, Ohio, a young woman wrecked her family car at the end of a chase by police through the campus of Ohio State University. The chase began about 2:30 a.m. when Columbus police notified OSU officers that a car with several occupants had been seen throwing eggs at cars along North High Street." That car was a scofflaw with a wicked curve.

Many blinkers are the offspring of wandering antecedents. This was the problem last year when a wire service reported that foul weather was hampering efforts to raise the Russian submarine Kursk. "An Arctic storm that put all work on hold never fully blew out as forecast, and divers experienced problems strapping it to its hoisting platform." They always say you can't keep a good storm down.

In The Wall Street Journal we learn about high-tech surveillance systems. "Video cameras installed in Britain have led to some criminal arrests, but no terrorists have been caught using them."

During a period of water restrictions in Florida, residents of the Quail Ridge development in Boynton Beach rode out the dry spell. "The development is exempt from water restrictions because it uses treated waste water that otherwise would be dumped into the ocean to irrigate its fairways, greens and residential lawns." Those ocean golf links are nothing but trouble.

Earthen embankments are just as troublesome. When actor Liam Neeson fractured his pelvis in a motorcycle accident, The Associated Press was there to cover the story. "Neeson was thrown from the motorcycle and landed in an earth embankment just before it ran into a tree about 70 miles north of New York City."

An outdoors writer contributed a piece on Alaskan fishing to the conservation magazine of Defenders of Wildlife. He recounted an unforgettable experience: "I caught a rainbow trout on a very small fly that was 31 inches long and weighed 12 pounds." That was no fly, mister, that was a bunnied.

There is no sure way for writers to avoid blinkers. These sins are usually sins of syntax — the misplaced phrase, the elusive antecedent, the accidentally omitted word. Alas, it is that old devil inattention that does the dirty work. The devil gave The Denver Post a feature story on British nannies. Not all nannies, said the Post, are "stern, older British nannies pushing baby carriages in feathered hats." Some of them are young British nannies pushing baby carriages in feathered hats. Let us read our copy one more time!

Readers are invited to send dated citations of usage to James Kilpatrick in care of this newspaper. His e-mail address is kilpat@aol.com.

Studebaker kept the fun going in otherwise grim days

By ANDREW ROBB JR.

Part II of a two-part series appears today. — Editor

In 1938, Studebaker Corp. began preparations to build an outdoor recreation center — Lippincott Field, situated in the 400 block of West Ewing Avenue (a scant four blocks from my home). It was a very generous-sized facility. Many events were scheduled there yearly. A highlight was the annual picnic for Studebaker employees and their families.

The Studebaker picnic was an all-day affair. Hot dogs, popcorn, soda pop and ice cream bars were all free with unlimited consumption. Various contests were available and all offered prizes. Some of the contests were baseball throws where you had to hit a target, basketball shooting, foot races and an unusual three-legged race involving two runners per team. The left leg of one was tied to the right leg of the other. The runners would race toward the finish line and no team would ever reach the goal without falling at least once.

Several times during the summer months boxing matches were scheduled at the Studebaker Recreation Center in the evenings. Six or seven weight divisions would be included. The participants were former or competing Golden Glove entrants — amateurs in stature, but certainly not lacking in ability. Alternately they would schedule wrestling matches. Those wrestlers would employ the same tactics as in present-day matches — all show but no glove! Still, the matches were free and great to watch.

Studebaker had a great semi-professional baseball team. It was part of a Midwest conference that played many outstanding teams. A nearby opponent was the House of David team from Benton Harbor. It was a mildly radical religious team but very entertaining.

My favorite team that Studebaker played was the Kansas City Monarchs. All of the team members were African-Americans. I was particularly fond of their outstanding pitcher, Satchel Paige. Every time they came to South Bend I would seek out Satchel. We enjoyed many nice visits. He was one of the greatest pitchers in America and beyond. Because of his color he was denied entry into the Major Leagues until his declining years, but he was a formidable foe.

The company's Fourth of July celebration always captivated my heart. Studebaker always had the largest, longest and most exciting fireworks in the entire Midwest. The Chicago Tribune always sent a correspondent to prepare a report on the festivities.

Six of my buddies and I were able to see all of these activities. We didn't pay in money but simply in labor. Whenever an event was scheduled we had to be at Lippincott Park at 6 a.m. The grandstand had to be sprayed with water. Then we had to dry mop the seats. We had to clean the toilets and the shower stalls. Remember, in those days many streets were unpaved, so dust was always being circulated.

The day after any event we had to report at 7 a.m. to clean up all the trash. We never harbored any ill feelings towards Studebaker. Quite the opposite, we always felt grateful to be involved with them. Despite the Great Depression, Studebaker Corp. was a giant bulwark in South Bend to help employees and their families such as mine cope with and overcome hard times.

Andrew J. Robb Jr. and his family are lifelong residents of South Bend and St. Joseph County.

'Top 10' pushed measures that shaped today's lives

By LEE HAMILTON

A few years back, Roll Call, which is a bit like the hometown newspaper for Capitol Hill, published a list of the 10 most influential members of Congress in the 20th century. It included some familiar names — Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, Robert Taft — and some names that people with a knowledge of American history would recognize, such as Joseph Cannon, the iron-fisted House Speaker in the early years of the 20th century and Robert La Follette Sr., the founder of the Progressive movement. As I read the article, though, I couldn't help but ponder how difficult creating the list must have been.

It's not fashionable these days to think of members of Congress as being influential. Sure, they're important in your community or in your state, and they may have some authority within their committees on Capitol Hill. But many people would argue that, other than funding that handy new highway bypass or post office, Congress has little concrete impact on American society.

With all due respect, I disagree. The reason choosing 10 names for the Roll Call article must have been so difficult is that it takes almost no effort at all to come up with a long list of individual members of Congress who have profoundly reshaped the lives of Americans.

Take Justin Smith Morrill, the Republican senator from Vermont, who in 1862 created the land-grant college and university system in the United States, opening up higher education to the working class. That was 140 years ago, and yet there are hundreds of thousands of young people today who, were it not for Morrill's efforts, would have a much harder time getting a college degree.

There's John Sherman, the Republican senator from Ohio, who believed in opening up competition by eliminating business conspiracies that seek to monopolize the marketplace. There isn't an American consumer out there who doesn't owe a debt to the 1890 Sherman Antitrust Act.

And then there are Rep. Edward Keating and Sen. Robert L. Owen, Democrats from Colorado and Oklahoma, respectively, who were appalled by the widespread use of young children to work in manufacturing and industrial plants. The 1916 Keating-Owen Act was the first federal effort to end child labor.

I could go on much longer than you'd have patience for: Rep. John Jacob Rogers of Massachusetts, who in 1924 created the U.S. Foreign Service, giving the United States a well-trained and educated network of diplomats all over the world; Rep. Sam Rayburn of Texas and Sen. George Norris of Nebraska, who in 1936 brought about passage of the Rural Electrification Act, transforming the lives of millions of Americans; Sens. Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota and Everett Dirksen of Illinois, who were the pivotal sponsors of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the landmark legislation opening the door to racial equality in the United States.

But here's what makes all of this even trickier. Particular pieces of legislation that change the country are important, but so is the institution itself.

In the end, Congress is where the American people express themselves in all their diversity, and come up some agreement on what to do about the problems of the day; if it doesn't work, then our republic doesn't work, either. So I would add to our brief survey, members of Congress who may not have a standout law bearing their name, but without whom we as a nation would be decidedly worse off.

I'm thinking here, for instance, of Richard Bolling, a brilliant Missourian who redesigned the federal budget process, making it far more open and accessible to the public, and whose knowledge of parliamentary procedure allowed him to push over the years for congressional reforms that made the institution itself far more responsive to the American people.

Others include Arthur Vandenberg, who exemplified bi-partisanship by helping a president of the opposite party enact the Marshall Plan for European reconstruction; Carl Albert, a conciliator skilled at crafting compromises; Tip O'Neill, who defined the modern Speakership and knew how to make the system work; and Mike Mansfield and Howard Baker, bridge builders who recognized the importance of developing consensus.

The American political system is built to foster delay, even gridlock, so that Congress can guard against hasty action, take the time it needs to gain public acceptance for courageous legislation and balance carefully the disparate forces in the country.

Forging majorities, making the necessary trade-offs, assuaging egos, and accommodating the different points of view in this highly diverse nation takes great political skill. All of the legislators I've mentioned here — and thousands of others — were able to manage that process. If Congress did not have people like them, the American political system would not work. I can't think of any greater measure of influence.

Lee H. Hamilton is director of The Center on Congress at Indiana University and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, in Washington, D.C. Hamilton served as a member of Congress from Indiana from 1965-99 and as chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee from 1993-95.

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