

COMMENTARY

Focus on facts, not fear factor, in field lab cleanup

Re: your June 23 editorial, "Cleanup at toxic field lab looks like a mirage" and William Vietinghoff's June 27 letter, "Lab cleanup":

CARLA BOLLINGER
GUEST COLUMNIST

Many people have listened to a one-sided view regarding the Santa Susana Field Laboratory cleanup as reported by Consumer Watchdog — its alleged facts are skewed and misrepresented.

residents living within two miles of the SSFL.

On a personal note: In the late 1970s, my family, including three young children, lived at the bottom of the Runkle property in Simi Valley, the SSFL watershed area, and more recently for 12 years on Woolsey Canyon in West Hills.

Vietinghoff, with firsthand knowledge as a former rocket engineer at the SSFL, reported in his letter what did occur at the field lab during the rocket engine testing and sodium reactor experiment.

After living on both sides of the SSFL within two miles, in different time periods, my family and I are cancer-free and healthy.

He presented the facts and recommendations based on sound judgment. Past and recent testing have shown that there is not a higher cancer risk for

The Consumer Watchdog group works on the human fear factor so that a responsible cleanup might not happen. The radical

“Many of us concerned about the environment are working to stop the insanity, save a thriving and important wildlife corridor, preserve Native American historical districts and historical rocket engine test stands. We want a SSFL cleanup, but a responsible cleanup that doesn't hurt the environment and human beings.”

cleanup to background will require more than 10 years of truckloads, minimum of 80,000 to 100,000 truckloads, of soil and rocks being excavated and hauled out causing more health risks versus a technical remediation as Boeing Co. has been conducting for years.

Half of the San Fernando Valley is a Superfund site because of contamination from gas stations, dry cleaners using chemicals,

machine shops and aerospace industry. No one is advocating demolishing all structures and excavating the soil in the eastern half of the Valley. Prior to government regulatory agencies, Environmental Protection Agency, an executive order signed by President Richard Nixon in 1970, and OSHA, also signed into law by President Nixon, contamination of our environment and safety for workers was not

a priority, especially during the Cold War era.

This is the past, but we need to now approach the SSFL cleanup in a risk-based assessment manner rather than a detrimental "retribution cleanup."

Many of us concerned about the environment are working to stop the insanity, save a thriving and important wildlife corridor, preserve Native American historical districts and historical rocket engine test

stands. We want a SSFL cleanup, but a responsible cleanup that doesn't hurt the environment and human beings.

To know the real facts, not hyperbole, about the contamination, the cleanup in process and the best scenario to ensure a safe cleanup, you are invited to attend the next Community Advisory Group meeting or attend a tour of the SSFL so you can learn more about the site and this natural wonderland. Website information about the SSFL cleanup is at www.ssmpla.com and www.ssflcag.net

Carla Bollinger, of Newbury Park, is a NASA Section 106 consultant and a Santa Susana Mountain Park Association board member.

Political failure of the marginal thinking test

In economics, "marginal" refers to trade-offs faced in making choices, which typically involve getting more of one thing and less of another. However, political rhetoric commonly misrepresents them as all or nothing. That is why we could use more politicians who are marginal in getting the relevant trade-offs right, rather than in being "barely adequate, if that."

GARY M. GALLES
GUEST COLUMNIST

greatly on circumstances and preferences (e.g., food might be "more important" than sleep, but most people disagree when their alarm goes off in the morning).

Failing to think at appropriate margins is a staple of politics. For instance, politicians are always telling people what they are for. But that is typically not what citizens really want to know, since politicians largely claim to be "for" the same things and "against" the same things.

And claims to such "special" status are made for everything anyone wants subsidized, implying that everything is special compared to everything else, which is logically impossible. The mirage of central planning "solutions" also fails the marginal thinking test. Those who claim planning is the cure for every social ailment ignore the fact that markets and the prices they generate are the only way we can accurately discover people's marginal willingness to trade off among goods.

What we really want to know is often the terms at which they would trade-off one thing they are for against other things they are for or at which they would accept what they are against to get more of something else they are for — i.e., what it will take to "sell us out" on various issues. Political abuse of "need" reflects failure to think at the margin. Since choices are typically between different "needs," it diverts attention from the actual choices. And since its primary political use is to assert that someone ought to have something they don't, it distracts from the redistributive payoff: How much will A's supposed need require B to pay for A's benefit?

When government short-circuits market processes, it makes that crucial information unknowable. That, in turn, requires that centralized planning necessarily throws away massive mutual gains markets enable.

"We" also generates confusion when government provides some special treatment, because of disproportionate distributions of benefits and burdens. One illustration is that when people assert "we" should provide certain goods and services, they usually mean "someone other than me" should pay, whether through taxes or other mechanisms (e.g., property owners forced to provide habitat for endangered species at their expense, although any benefits are shared by all).

Failing to think at the margin blinds many to trade's mutual benefits. They think market exchanges involve equal values or even harmful exploitation, rather than recognizing that exchanges create wealth because voluntary arrangements occur only when all parties expect their incremental benefits to exceed incremental costs.

Without clearly spelling out who will actually be forced to pay how much, as is typical, we cannot analyze the real trade-offs involved.

Misunderstanding gains from trade, they fail to see the harm society suffers from restricting it, a fallacy behind a host of harmful government policies.

Categorical language represents another marginal misunderstanding. One thing (e.g., food) is often asserted to be categorically more important than others. However, the relative values of goods actually depend

Marginal misunderstanding permeates public policy, particularly because people think less carefully about other people's money than their own. That is why marginal thinking provides valuable protection against political snake oil.

There is no other way to force politicians to spell out and defend the real positions and trade-offs they would impose on citizens, by stripping away such misrepresentation and misdirection.

Gary M. Galles is a professor of economics at Pepperdine University in Malibu and author of "Faulty Premises, Faulty Policies."



The Oxnard Harbor District, which oversees the Port of Hueneme, and officials with the city of Port Hueneme have been arguing over a revenue-sharing arrangement since at least 2009.

Port seeks open talks with city

For decades, the Oxnard Harbor District has proudly served our community. From managing the complex infrastructure of port operations to contributing to municipal growth and development, we have a long history of working with the city to create a positive impact.

KRISTIN DECAS
GUEST COLUMNIST

We would now like to engage the city in a dialogue (using a professional independent mediator) to determine the most cost-efficient ways to continue fulfilling our fiscal responsibilities to the community.

district. Shouldn't we rechannel our resources into more productive and beneficial areas?

What the district seeks is very simple: An opportunity to share ideas to bring our agreements with the city up to date. Currently, the district and the city are bound by a set of outdated operating agreements, some of which go back decades. The oldest of these dates back to 1983. But, of course, times change. What existed then may have long since evolved.

Clearly, we must bring our agreements with the city in line with the times. A careful updating will ensure maximum benefits to both the port and the community at large.

Indeed, sweeping changes have reshaped the municipal landscape. As a result, portions of the existing agreements are out of step with the times. Even slight changes can have far-reaching consequences for the port and the community.

Naturally, we feel duty-bound to honor our agreements with the city. In this case, however, we also must consider our duty to the port and the community.

For instance, under the 1983 agreement, the district must pay for improvements to certain city streets. Yet, in 2014 these same streets no longer serve the public interest or benefit the

Throughout history, both government and business organizations have renegotiated agreements whenever situations evolve. There's a similar need for re-evaluation in our case.

Currently, the district is required to pay the city a percentage of its gross operating revenue. The amount is determined by an annual audit. According to the agreement, the district also must pay a fee for new import vehicles convoyed through the city.

To meet these requirements, the district enlists the services of independent professional auditors. These highly qualified

professionals conduct their audits in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles. The methodology of the district's audit has remained unchanged since before the 1983 agreement was signed. Thanks to the thoroughness of these auditors, the district has earned excellence in accounting awards for the past four years.

For more than 30 years, we consistently have paid all required amounts, as well as all convoy fees per the agreements. In addition, the district's economic impact contributes yearly tax revenues of \$1.6 million to the city. Combine this with the \$1.2 million we pay directly to the city as stipulated in the current agreements, and our combined financial impact is a robust \$2.8 million annually.

According to this figure, we are the second largest contributor to Port Hueneme's 2013-14 annual general fund budget. The district wants to know that these directly paid funds are being used to maximize the benefits to the city, the district and, most importantly, the community.

Bringing the agreements up to date will ensure the fulfillment of this goal and actually opens the door to create increased revenue opportunities for both parties.

The district remains hopeful of opportunity to engage the city in a

dialogue that focuses on these vital issues. Repeatedly, it has offered to renegotiate all three agreements to bring them current with existing conditions.

The district maintains its belief that these issues are best addressed through an ongoing dialogue with the city. By sharing ideas through open channels of communication, we can restore relevancy to our agreements and thereby serve the community to the fullest.

The district's commitment to the community is already well-established. Not only does our organization provide employment opportunities to thousands of residents, we support many local and institutional programs; offer internship programs; host an annual Maritime Career Day; and partner with local universities to develop maritime education programs.

Each year, the district also hosts the popular Banana Festival and participates in the city's annual Beach Festival — events that tie the city, port and the community together in a very special way.

The district would very much welcome and look forward to open communications with the city to ensure this tradition of public benefits now and into the future.

Kristin Decas is CEO and port director for the Port of Hueneme.

Saying a final goodbye to an old Simi Valley friend

Dear Simi Elementary School, I'm sure you have heard by now that your caretakers, the Simi Valley Unified School District board voted, 4-1 to shutter your doors and keep kids from learning within your thick historic walls.

MICHAEL A. HOLLANDER
GUEST COLUMNIST

powers that be decided it was best to just turn off life support.

One bright note is that school board trustee Debbie Sandland does know you and stood by you with her lone dissenting vote.

I can't totally blame the current school board for your fate. Past school boards have had 10 years of opportunities and the money to make it right. In fact, the community that you have educated supported a bond in 2004 to generate the money to fix you and your younger colleagues — the other

school campuses.

You were even singled out in the bond language as the shining example of why the voters should support fixing our aging schools. The bond passed, but you were cast aside instead of receiving your adequate share of the prize to bring you back to the level you have enjoyed for almost 90 years.

I know you would be surprised to witness your school board in action.

Even though I don't have a glimpse behind the scenes, it would appear that it is the "staff" running our district and

not the school board.

It is in line with the expression, the tail wagging the dog.

Members of the staff deliver financial data to the board, but also appear to create the decision and policy by how that data is interpreted and displayed. It almost appears that if the board does not go along with the staff's recommendations, the elected ones appear foolish.

If that weren't enough, the teachers union seems to insert itself into many district issues that don't appear to have a direct

relationship to its supposed interest in the well-being or advancement of your district. Why would a teachers union support closing you or any of your brethren?

Sorry you had to hear all of this. I realize you are probably disappointed in those whom you trusted to take care of your structure and the historical significance you represent for the entire city, not just the students who were lucky enough to be in your care.

Hopefully soon, eyes will open, and the truth about the misdirection

of your bond money will be apparent to more than just a few concerned parents, neighbors, teachers and former students.

It would really be wonderful to see you as an arts and technology magnet school attracting fresh students from the neighborhood, private schools and even other districts.

Then, you could smile again, open those adobe arms and welcome laughing children once more. Be well, my friend.

Michael A. Hollander lives in Simi Valley.