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ENVIRONMENT *Writer*

JUST THINKING

I'm a walking, talking conflict of interest.

The walking part doesn't bother me so much.

It's the talking part that raises the question.

Good thing I'm no longer a self-respecting journalist.

Self-respecting, yes.

Journalist, no. Not any longer. I've been called worse, mind you, much worse. And time was I was one.

Self-respecting, that is. AND a journalist.

No longer.

No journalist would/could harbor the conflicts I bare.

Money, for instance, take money. As in income.

Mine comes not solely from the pursuit of the journalistic trade, with its obsessive commitment to ferreting out the facts, come what may.

Mine comes instead from a network of consulting relationships.

I get (get this!) funding from federal agencies. Like EPA. Like NOAA. Like the Department of Energy. Like USGS. Consulting relationships with the likes of them span issues ranging from climate change to "red tide" and other coastal and marine issues and geographic mapping and data.

Relationships? Forget about George Washington's advice of "avoiding entangling alliances."

I've got them. Coming out the old wazoo, they might say, or at least as someone might say.

A part-time consulting relationship with a Boston area for-profit environmental consulting firm, for which a primary client is,

—see *Just Thinking*, p. 2

Homeland Security Bill May Create New FOIA Exemption

Joseph A. Davis

President Bush and many in Congress—in the name of "homeland security" and in a political climate driven by continuing serious concerns over terrorism—were poised in late July to cut off public disclosure of an indefinite and vaguely defined amount of information about environmental and public health hazards.

Fast-moving legislation could allow companies, and also states and local governments, to unilaterally and without review impose secrecy on information dealing with issues such as toxic pollution, drinking water contamination, pipeline safety lapses, dam safety, electric utility pollution and reliability, sewage plant overflows, nuclear plant safety, and the healthfulness of air in public buildings.

These proposals drew sharp objections from leaders of the Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) and other groups. It is the first time that SEJ has taken a formal position on legislation involving the First Amendment and the Freedom of Information Act.

Congress in late July was still debating parts of President Bush's homeland security bill (HR 5005) that would create a new exemption to the Freedom of Information Act

(FOIA). The final disposition of the provision had not been decided.

The provision (Sec. 204) declares: "Information provided voluntarily by non-Federal entities or individuals that relates to infrastructure vulnerabilities or other vulnerabilities to terrorism and is or has been in the possession of the Department shall not be subject to section 552 of title 5, United States Code [FOIA]."

"If simply volunteering information to the government makes that information private or secret, it is going to make it harder for journalists to do their jobs," said SEJ President James Bruggers, who reports on environment for *The Courier-Journal* in Louisville, Ky.

Bruggers, on behalf of SEJ and in concert with other journalism organizations, signed on to a July 10, 2002, letter to Congress raising concerns about the vagueness of the provision and calling on Congress to reject it.

"This overbroad and unnecessary provision would severely compromise public health and safety, not to mention the public's right to know. Congress should reject this provision, as it is ripe for misuse and abuse," the letter said (www.sej.org/foia_letter.htm).

—see *Security*, p. 6

SEJ Conference in Baltimore in October

The Beat: How Important?

"How important is the environment beat?"

If it's important to those reporters whose very beat it is, several hundred of them will be showing up in Baltimore, Md., in October for the Society of Environmental Journalists' (SEJ) 12th annual conference.

Their answer to that question—which headlines the SEJ advance program brochure for the October 9–13 meeting—will come in the context of:

- continued national economic uncertainties;
- the ongoing aftermath of last Sep-

tember's terrorist attacks and the prolonged war against terrorism and its unquenchable appetite for finite column inches and air time; and

■ a presidential administration seemingly determined to effect major and controversial changes in environmental regulatory programs.

SEJ conference planners are betting and hoping that the group's usual lineup of wall-to-wall substantive and well-sourced panels, trips, and presentations will again attract hundreds of print and broadcast reporters from across the United States and a handful of foreign countries.

—see *SEJ Conference* p. 7

JUST THINKING (from p. 1)

again, EPA. You've heard of the agency's indicators-based "State of the Environment Report," due out this fall? That's the one. For two days a week, it helps put bread on my table. If you start seeing rave reviews in *Environment Writer* about that indicators initiative, reader beware! But what if you don't see any coverage at all of it here? Again, reader beware.

Conflif c'est moi.

Look at the Heinz Center for Science, Economics, and the Environment. They're a client too. They and their upcoming indicators report. Count that one another conflict, and count it too as another reason I am conflif.

Oh. What about the Environmental Law Institute (ELI)? The 30-some-year-old non-profit organization for the environmental bar?

You got it. I'm conflicted there too. I'm now (you heard it here first, and are you ready?) a "visiting scholar" at ELI. My 11th grade science teacher, Stein S. Griggs, as I recall, must be rolling over in the proverbial or literal grave.

The ELI relationship stems from the two Energy Department and EPA grants on climate change, previously mentioned. True. Under my previous hat, I also was doing

grant work through my employer for those two agencies, all of which we've previously disclosed in *Environment Writer*.

Now, though, the grants are going through ELI. Yet another conflict. If you start reading here about ELI's outstanding reports or its vast contributions to the environmental law and policy fields, ask yourself why you never noticed them here before. Chances are you didn't. Chances are you won't still.

Don't forget about the University of Rhode Island (URI), and its Graduate School of Oceanography (GSO), and its Metcalf Institute for Marine & Environmental Reporting. They're the ones, as I hope you know, now behind *Environment Writer*. They're the grantee for the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation grants that sustain *Environment Writer* and our involvement with *TipSheet*. More conflicts here: URI, GSO, Metcalf, and Hewlett.

The burden gets heavier. I want more. Not necessarily more conflif, you understand, just more consulting relationships that will allow my colleagues and me to continue what we like doing, as in publishing *Environment Writer* and its "brethren" newsletter *TipSheet*. That one we co-publish with the Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) and the Radio

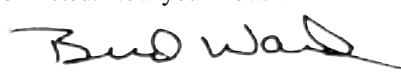
and Television News Directors Foundation.

Does that makes those two relationships also potential conflicts? Maybe. Shouldn't *EW* feel free to report, for instance, on SEJ—"without fear or favor, bias or prejudice," as they say? Yes, and we do feel so free and, in fact, obligated. If their annual conference this year stinks, we hope you'll read it here. If it's a blowout, we hope you'll learn that too here.

But what we really hope is that you'll be there in Baltimore yourself to draw your own opinion, and not have to rely on reading about it here later. Ah, yes. Yet another conflict: I'm organizing and moderating a panel at SEJ in Baltimore. I hope it's a knockout, frankly, but if so, or if not, how might that affect coverage of it in *Environment Writer*. Doth I "re-cuse"? Probably.

Disclosure. Think about it. I'll admit I now annually "tithe" to SEJ, beyond the annual dues itself. It won't make them rich, mind you, not by a long shot. But does it too represent a conflict? You could say so.

Walking, talking conflict of interest. 'Tis I. Forget about the walking part. Don't forget about the talking part.

I'm conflicted. Now you know. 

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Getting *Environment Writer*...

About that June issue of *Environment Writer*, the first since the publication temporarily ceased operations at the end of January 2002:

We mailed it bulk-rate from a Rhode Island post office. Which explains why most journalists didn't get it until some time in late July. Perhaps not much before they got the combined July/August issue in fact.

Whoops. Mea culpa. We're fixing that. This July/August issue mails first class. We think that's the right thing to do if we're serious—and we are—about it's having some inherent timeliness value.

We hope you'll agree, and we hope too that you'll forgive the late delivery of the June issue. We regret that.

While on the subject of your getting *Environment Writer*:

First-class postal rates have just gone up, by about 8 percent—from 34 to 37 cents for an eight-page issue of *Environment Writer*. Further postal increases are already being discussed.

As of this November, reporters getting *Environment Writer* will receive it electronically as an attached PDF file. That way, you'll get it faster and still without cost and, frankly, we'll get it to you at less cost. You'll be able to read it online, save it to a file, or print it as you might prefer. **IT WILL NO LONGER BE PRINTED AND MAILED AFTER THE OCTOBER ISSUE.**

We NEED your current and preferred e-mail address. Please send it to kmarstille@aol.com with "EW by PDF" in the subject line. Thank you.

The Editors

READING RACK

“Recycling Faces a Heap of Trouble,” *The Wall Street Journal*, July 9, 2002: As if further signs were needed that Americans’ commitment to their environmental ideals were a sometime-thing when it comes to doing and not just talking! John Fialka reports that “the fizz has gone” out of the recycling business. It’s a first for Americans in 20 years that they’re throwing away more aluminum than they’re recycling. Fialka finds a common thread between environmentalists and industry: both see the trend as “an ill omen for the rest of the recycling business,” in which aluminum usually leads the parade. Americans dig recycling, poll data show, but “people are just too busy,” Fialka quotes the Container Recycling Institute’s Jennifer Gitlitz as saying. Glass and plastic bottle data show those too are headed increasingly for the trash heap and not for the recycling container, Fialka reports. Blame the ill winds on the 90s roaring economy, one theory goes, holding that recycling founders when people are feeling good about their wallets. Another factor: when folks are on the road, they tend to trash it and not recycle it, “and more cans are emptied away from home.” Fialka reports that the drop in recycling is taking place even in states with aggressive container-deposit laws.

“Pace of Toxic Cleanups Slows as Funding, Support Dwindle,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 10, 2002: Staff writer Brad Knickerbocker finds a political minefield for the President and for his congressional critics in the slowdown on Superfund cleanups. Going from the “polluter pays” tax on industry that expired in 1995 to the taxpayer-supported cleanups approach has reduced available annual funding from \$3.8 billion to about \$28 million by the end of this year. “The bottom line in this dispute is that taxpayers are bearing an increasing percentage of the cost for those sites where the responsible parties fail to do the cleanup themselves,” he writes. As for the politics of the situation, Knickerbocker writes: “Unless they handle it deftly, the administration will look bad on environmental issues (already one of its weak spots); Democrats will look like tax-and-spenders for wanting to nail certain businesses for the cost of cleanup even if they had nothing to do with polluting. And some polluted communities actually prefer not to be cleaned up, since designation as a Superfund site brings a stigma that turns away business.”

“Study Fuels Worry over Glacial Melting,” *The Washington Post*, July 19, 2002: A *Science* magazine report fuels Eric Pianin’s piece, subtitled “Research Shows Alaskan Ice Mass Vanishing at Twice Rate Previously Estimated.” Scientists “can’t say” whether human activities lie behind the melting, he reports, saying the study shows the changes “dramatically altering the majestic contours of the state and driving up sea levels” (his phrase, not a quote from the science report itself). Annual melting of an average of six feet—and in some cases “a few hundred feet”—were determined through “highly precise airborne laser measurements” of 67 Alaskan glaciers from the mid-1950s to the mid-1990s. The “seemingly small” resulting two-tenths of a millimeter annual rise in sea levels “nevertheless could eventually have long-term implications for flooding on Pacific islands and along coastal areas, the researchers concluded.” The University of Alaska, Fairbanks, study “offers a vivid and troubling picture of the potential adverse impact of climate change on the United States and the rest of the world,” Pianin reports. His piece quotes global warming skeptic Sallie L. Baliunas of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics as saying the increased melting might be temporary and the result of warm Pacific Ocean water and wind patterns that began in the mid-1970s. Baliunas: “It doesn’t have the fingerprints of enhanced greenhouse gas concentrations.” Alaska Senator Ted Stevens, a Republican, said “Regardless of cause, many changes predicted worldwide appear to be happening first and with greater severity in arctic regions, including Alaska.”

“The Swamp” (four-part series), *The Washington Post*, June 23–26, 2002: Michael Grunwald’s epic, almost book-length, in-depth account of the problems with Florida’s Everglades is a must-read (and still online). It tells not only what went wrong when the development of real estate, agriculture, and industry (along with Corps of Engineers controls structures) insulted the original “River of Grass,” but also what is going wrong with the multibillion dollar “Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan.” What was sold to the public as an effort to return southern Florida to its natural hydrological and ecological state has become a massive water supply project for agriculture and real estate development. Grunwald quotes former Corps chief Michael Parker as saying the project could cost \$60 to \$80 billion. Grunwald: “This is likely to become America’s most expensive public works project ever.” Here’s another bite of Grunwald’s narrative: “Even though South Florida’s population is growing faster than Haiti’s or India’s—and enjoying some of the nation’s cheapest water—the plan commits to supplying enough water for its population to double again as baby boomers retire to its condos and golf courses. Florida will have a veto over all 52 of the plan’s projects, and one clause stipulates that no aspect of the plan can harm anyone in any way.”

“Yucca Vote Unlikely to Deter Skull Valley Dump,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 15, 2002: Reporter Judy Fahys does what so few U.S. journalists did when the critical Senate vote on the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository came in July—she goes beyond the handouts, set-pieces, and rhetoric of the lobby groups to report the reality of gritty politics that goes into such votes. In this case, it centered on a deal announced by Utah Senators Orrin Hatch and Bob Bennett who said they agreed to support Yucca Mountain in exchange for Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham’s commitment to block federal funds for a private nuclear waste repository planned for their state. A decade and a half ago, when now-retired Senate Energy Chairman J. Bennett Johnston (D-LA) rammed the original Yucca Mountain bill through the Senate, such deals were hidden rather than flaunted. Despite pious rhetoric about scientific investigation and vigilant NRC regulation, Johnston forced the waste on Nevada by promising other states they could avoid it if they gave him their vote (or threatening to dump it on them if they didn’t). With Yucca receding into the infinite future, a consortium named Private Fuel Storage (PFS) planned to build a temporary repository on the Skull Valley Goshute Indian Reservation. But Fahys raises the question of whether Utah’s Senators were “duped.” With the sort of emperor’s-clothes skepticism so rare in today’s journalism, she points out that PFS had always planned to build with private money and had never expected a dime from the feds.

“Biologists Fear Vietnamese Bait Could Harm Md.,” *The Baltimore Sun*, July 15, 2002: Candus Thomson has a good story to tell: “Like any good horror story, the northern snakehead saga already has a Maryland sequel in the pipeline: the Vietnamese nuclear worm. Hot-pink and up to 5 feet long, the worms have quietly made their way from the brackish waters of Southeast Asian mangrove forests to bait and tackle shops around the Chesapeake Bay.” The worms, Thomson says, are great bait: “fat, cheap and juicy, hardy in Maryland summers with no refrigeration needed.” But like many other exotic species dumped from a bait bucket, the nuclear worm has biologists worried. USFWS biologist Julie Thompson says “I’ve handled a lot of things, and I don’t get creeped out. But these are nasty. I use surgical gloves every time I touch them, and I scrub up afterwards.” Tests show the worms come loaded with vibrio bacteria. That’s the genus that includes the cholera germ and others that attack shellfish—the economic lifeblood of Chesapeake Bay.

—see *Reading Rack* p. 8

BACKGROUND *(This population background was produced with financial support from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.)*

Population and Climate

The population-climate connection is worth covering because—whether they pay attention to it or not—it will eventually affect the lives of people all over North America in serious ways.

Certainly there are local population-climate connections in various parts of the United States (for example, the fogs that result from irrigated agriculture in California's Central Valley). But when it comes to global climate change—the greenhouse warming most scientists now regard as inevitable—it is global population growth that is a critical variable.

There are many sources detailing the potential impacts of global climate change on the United States. An example is the "National Assessment" (www.usgcrp.gov/usgcrp/nacc/default.htm). But the focus of this background is how population growth interacts with climate.

Just about any expert discussion of the planet's climate future tends to rely on a series of line graphs showing trend lines climbing steadily upward through the 19th and 20th centuries, then through the 21st and beyond. Rarely do we stop and ask why all these trend lines for fossil fuel consumption ... carbon dioxide emissions ... global mean temperature ... and sea level rise ... are climbing so inexorably upward.

One of the many answers is simple: population. And that is one trend that is not inevitable. The people of the world have it in their power to affect their own population destiny.

Perhaps another good reason to cover the population-climate connection is that there are many economic interests, political factions, and religious forces working energetically to keep journalists from covering it. Often, it is the uncomfortable or "suppressed" story that people need most to hear. (The Society of Environmental Journalists' (SEJ) October meeting in Baltimore will include a plenary on "taboo topics," including population.)

Story Ideas

1. Has climate change ever been disastrous for large human populations in the past? If you live in North America, you may find that this was true for pre-Columbian civilizations.
2. Has population growth in your locality or region had any localized climate impacts? Has anyone measured the "urban heat island effect" for your area?
3. Has anyone tried to calculate greenhouse gas emissions per capita for your area? How do they compare to those for the United States as a whole or for the world? As a starting point, check out EPA's greenhouse gas emissions inventory.

Background and Context

Population Growth and Climate Change

Most of the mechanisms by which humans affect global climate depend directly on the number of humans that populate the planet. It is common in political rhetoric for advocates to blame climate change on industrialization, on the energy-intensive lifestyles of nations like the United States, or on economic development and higher technology generally—but that misses some of the point. People cause global warming. This is true by definition, because it is anthropogenic global warming we are talking about. Other things being equal, more people will cause more global warming.

Carbon dioxide, the major man-made greenhouse gas, offers an example. It is formed when any number of fuels burn. Policy debaters pay

the most attention to fossil fuel combustion, because that is a matter of taking carbon (coal, oil, methane) that has been in long-term storage beneath the earth and releasing it as carbon dioxide into the atmosphere (from which it was removed millions of years ago).

The amount of fossil fuel that a nation burns depends on a number of things. Imagine a place (like Massachusetts) where almost everyone uses fuel oil to heat their home during the winter. Of course, almost every resident burns a certain amount of fuel oil to keep from freezing to death. But some—the poor—cannot afford to burn more than a bare minimum, and they shiver through the winter, unlike the rich who burn all they want. There is another group—let's call them the smart—who have well-insulated homes and high-efficiency furnaces, who burn no more oil than the shivering poor, but bask as comfortably as the warmest rich.

That example is the basis for a famous formula theoretically describing the environmental impacts of resource use. Often called the IPAT formula, it was stated by Stanford biologist and population pessimist Paul Ehrlich and his colleague J.P. Holdren. It states that Environmental Impact (I) equals Population size (P) times Affluence, or consumption per person (A), times Technology, or damage per unit of consumption (T).

The point is that population is a multiplier of any human impact on the environment. Only by improving some other term in the equation can population be increased without proportional environmental impact.

The human impact on atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide occurs through many mechanisms, but most of them are population-related. It doesn't make much difference whether the use of fossil fuel is for heating or for cooling—or for industrial production, for fueling cars, or for the generation of electricity to light homes or streets or do a thousand other things. Of course the impacts will be greater in more affluent countries where people actually have air conditioners and can afford to run them.

Humans have also affected the global carbon balance by cutting down trees, which absorb and store carbon. Population pressures in countries like Brazil have led to the destruction of forests (and release of carbon) through slash-and-burn agriculture. But the harvesting of trees without replacing them—whether for agriculture, homebuilding, or fuel—negatively affects the climate in a number of ways. Only recently, for example, have scientists begun to appreciate how much carbon is stored in soils, which are changed by agricultural clearing and other human land-use changes. All of these things are connected to population.

Nor is carbon dioxide the only gas that makes a population-climate connection. Methane is another. Several of the most important causes of the post-industrial jump in atmospheric methane concentrations are directly linked to human population. Examples include rice agriculture and the digestive gas emissions of cattle and other agricultural ruminant animals—not to mention the gas from decomposing trash in landfills. All of these things, likewise, are closely linked to population—the number of people eating rice, drinking milk, or throwing away trash.

These connections are not merely theoretical. Between the years 1900 and 2000, the world's population just about quadrupled, from 1.6 billion to 6.1 billion. During the same period, emissions of carbon dioxide grew 12-fold, from an estimated 534 million metric tons to 6.59 billion metric tons in 1997.

Technology: Problem or Solution?

"Technology" can be good or bad, environmentally. We can think of a nation's technological progress as consisting of ever more and bigger cars per capita, which of course emit more carbon dioxide per mile. But

we can also think of technological progress as the development of less-polluting and more energy-efficient cars, with the opposite impact.

Developing nations have argued, in the Kyoto climate treaty talks, that since the rich industrialized nations have put most of the carbon dioxide into the atmosphere (by virtue of affluence and technology), the industrialized nations should bear the burden of reductions. The developing nations, believing rich nations have already committed the planet to climate change, resent now being asked to forego their own economic development.

That is why some nations have paid so much attention to Kyoto provisions like the “clean development mechanism.” Through CDM projects, industrialized nations can help poor nations speed economic development by selling them cleaner and more energy-efficient technology. That way, everybody wins.

Impacts: Populations Bear the Brunt

Often (but not always) nations where population is densest and growing fastest are also those where economic development is lower or slower and where people are most vulnerable to climate change. Bangladesh is a good example.

Bangladesh's population is the eighth highest in the world, with 130 million people in an area the size of Wisconsin. It is also desperately poor, with per capita income averaging \$370. Many of its people live in the low-lying alluvial plain next to the Bay of Bengal, which floods often, killing tens of thousands of people. The sea-level rise that will accompany global warming—along with a possible increase in frequency and intensity of storms many climate scientists fear—will make the flooding more frequent and more deadly, and ultimately deprive the nation of farmland it needs to feed its population.

The connections between population growth/density and vulnerability to climate change are many, complex, and sometimes indirect, but real nonetheless. Places where population growth has outstripped economic development are places where people are forced to live at the margin of what natural resources will sustain.

One point of connection is water. In the United States, for example, many of the states with the greatest population growth (Arizona, California, Florida, and Nevada,) are also the ones where water resources are the most stressed. This is a matter of even greater concern in the parts of the world where basic sanitation and health services are wanting. The World Health Organization recently estimated that some 1.5 billion people worldwide lack access to clean drinking water and 3 billion lack basic sanitation. One result is that 5 to 12 million people die each year from dirty-water diseases—a problem that gets worse when populations are crowded together.

Another point of connection is land and food. Even today, as recurring famines in sub-Saharan Africa have shown, even short-term variations in climate can mean failure of the food supply for millions of people. Human history and pre-history seem to offer example after example of major populations or civilizations vanishing when climate change took away their food supply. The examples range from the Indus Valley thousands of years ago to the Anasazi in the American Southwest only a few hundred years ago.

Issues

1. What is the U.S. government's population policy? How is this policy formed? Are environmental issues such as climate considered in forming U.S. population policy?

2. Should the administration withhold the \$34 million Congress appropriated for the U.N. Population Fund this year, on the grounds that it allegedly encourages forced abortions and sterilizations in China? Will withholding the money—as the administration now has decided to do—cause more abortions than it might prevent as critics assert?

Players and Sources

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: *Climate Change 2001: The Scientific Basis* (New York, 2001), Cambridge University Press. This is an authoritative and up-to-date compilation of consensus science on the physical processes involved in climate change. (www.ipcc.ch/pub/tar/wg1/index.htm)

Population Reference Bureau: An established source of objective and authoritative information on population matters. Press contact: Ellen Carnevale, (202) 939-5407, ecarnevale@prb.org, (www.prb.org/). The group collects population-related links online (www.popnet.org).

Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CEISIN): Based at Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, CEISIN is a good source of information about the social and economic impacts of climate change. Press contact: W. Christopher Lenhardt, (845) 365-8988, clenhardt@ciesin.columbia.edu. Washington, D.C. Office: (202) 314-3822, (www.ciesin.org/)

PlanetWire: This is a free and ultra-cool electronic news service focused on population and environment, including backgrounders, a broad-based daily clip service (subscribable by e-mail), and more. Press contact: Kathy Bonk or Cecilia Snyder, Communications Consortium Media Center (CCMC), (202) 326-8711, csnyder@ccmc.org, (www.planetwire.org/)

World Resources Institute: An established and academically respected think tank on world resources issues, with a focus on sustainability. Press contact: Adlai Amor, (202) 729-7736, aamor@wri.org, (www.wri.org/)

Worldwatch Institute: Another respected think tank with an even more pronounced slant toward sustainability. Press contact: Leanne Mitchell, (202) 452-1992, ext. 527, lmitchell@worldwatch.org, (www.worldwatch.org/)

Population Connection (formerly Zero Population Growth): An advocacy group focused on population issues. Press contact: Mark Daley, (202) 745-3179, Mark@PopulationConnection.org (www.populationconnection.org/)

Population Action International: An advocacy-oriented policy shop with lots of solid information, especially on population-environment connections. Press contact: Sally Ethelston, (202) 557-3400, sae@popact.org, (www.populationaction.org/)

United Nations Population Fund: The U.N.'s official population organization. Especially helpful is its publication, *Footprints and Milestones: Population and Environmental Change—The State of World Population 2001*. Press contact: William Ryan, (212) 297-5279, ryanw@unfpa.org, (www.unfpa.org/)

American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS): An especially useful reference is the AAAS *Atlas of Population and Environment*, by Paul Harrison and Fred Pearce (Berkeley, 2000), University of California Press. Press office: (202) 326-6440, media@aaas.org, (www.aaas.org/news/) Available also from CCMC, above. 🐼

Security (from p.1)

FOIA mandates that any member of the public have access to most government information by asking for it in writing. The law exempts some basic areas such as employee personnel files, prosecutorial files, trade secrets, and national security information. Most journalists consider FOIA a basic tool for getting information about government.

Since FOIA was enacted in 1966, no additional exemptions had been added until 1999, when the chemical industry and others succeeded in a years-long campaign to limit public access to information about the hazards which chemical plants pose to surrounding communities (see September 2000 *EW*, www.nsc.org/ehc/ew/issues/ew00sep.htm#chemical). Another exemption was created in this year's bioterrorism bill, HR 3448, which President Bush signed into law (PL 107-188) on June 12, 2002. That bill requires local drinking water utilities to conduct terrorism vulnerability assessments, but exempts the assessments from FOIA.

The "voluntary disclosure" FOIA exemption in the homeland security bill is seen by many as a reincarnation of several earlier failed industry lobby campaigns to empower companies to remove embarrassing, inconvenient, or incriminating information from the public record merely by submitting it to the government. A lobbying campaign in the mid-1990s sought passage of a federal "audit privilege" law (see June 1997 *EW* at www.nsc.org/ehc/ew/issues/ew97jun.htm#audit), which EPA opposed. Some 20 states eventually passed such laws.

A second such effort over the past two years operates in the name of "critical infrastructure security." HR 2435 (known as the Davis-Moran bill) was introduced well before the "9/11" terrorist attacks and S 1456 (Bennett-Kyl) was introduced immediately after. These bills were pushed by major industry groups, but drew stiff opposition from environmental and right-to-know groups and never made it to the hearing stage.

Industry groups and the Bush administration argue that such provisions are necessary to keep terrorists from knowing about safety, health, and environmental vulnerabilities that they could exploit to harm U.S. citizens. Environmentalists argue that public disclosure of such hazards is the best way—without top-down government regulation—to push companies and governments to make facilities safer in the first place.

The journalism and media groups opposing Section 204 of the homeland security bill argued that it is unnecessary. They say FOIA already has exemptions for business secrets and national security information that can be used to address infrastructure security concerns.

The administration's homeland security bill went before the House under very unusual procedures. Under a special rule (H Res. 449), it was referred to a dozen major committees, with a short time to consider it and make recommendations. The rule also created a Select Committee on Homeland Security, for the sole purpose of considering the bill. That panel was supposed to consider the various and possibly conflicting views of the dozen committees, and forge them into a single bill that could be sent to the floor of the full House.

The House Select Committee, with five Republicans and four Democrats, is chaired by Majority Leader Dick Arme (R-TX). Its recommendations generally track the administration's bill and the wishes of the GOP leadership.

As this issue of *EW* went to press in late July, it appeared that House floor action would be completed before *EW* reached readers' mailboxes. Arme had indicated that he wanted to keep some form of FOIA exemption in the bill, and there are indications that language similar to the Davis-Moran bill might be substituted.

Other versions of the "voluntary disclosure" exemption actually went much further than the administration's bill—offering immunity from prosecution and regulatory proceedings, exemption from

Perilous Times: SEJ Forms 1st Amendment Panel

The Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ), during its 12-year history, has remained steadfastly less "activist" than many other journalism organizations. But the post-9/11 restrictions of information access may have changed that.

In early April 2002, as the list of information removed from public record grew, the SEJ Board of Directors decided to form a First Amendment Task Force. Chairing the panel is Ken Ward, Jr., of *The Charleston Gazette*. SEJ's voicing of concern about Sec. 204 of the Homeland Security bill was one of the first things the panel agreed on.

SEJ has traditionally steered clear of taking positions on any kind of public policy issue. The group's leaders and members tend to be scrupulous in guarding its journalistic professionalism and objectivity—and its 501(c)3 non-profit status.

But SEJ President Jim Bruggers says the Board and the Task Force are worried about erosion of journalists' ability to do their job—informing the public. They think SEJ can take positions on First Amendment issues without compromising its professionalism.

"Our goal is to make sure that our members, and the larger journalism community, know what we've got before it's gone," Bruggers wrote in a column in the Summer 2002 issue of *SEJournal*. "...It was not lost on the SEJ Board that laws requiring this information be made public were adopted in the first place to inform the public about threats to the environment and public health. Mind you, this effort is not about advocating for any particular environmental policy. It's about advocating for the First Amendment—something every journalist should be doing."

antitrust laws, the Federal Advisory Committees Act, whistleblower laws, and more. With groups such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce backing some of those provisions, it was unclear

Journalism Organizations Protest FOIA Exemption

The following were signers of the July 10, 2002, letter to Congress: Jim Bruggers, SEJ; Al Cross, President, Society of Professional Journalist; Diane McFarlin, President, American Society of Newspaper Editors; John F. Sturm, President and CEO, Newspaper Association of America; Barbara Cochran, President, Radio-Television News Directors Association; Jerry Reppert, Chairman, Government Relations, National Newspaper Association; Lucy Dalglish, Executive Director, Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press; H.L. Hall, President, Journalism Education Association; Tom Devine, Legal Director, Government Accountability Project; Ted Gest, President, Criminal Justice Journalists; Jenny Crouch, President, College Media Advisers.

whether Democrats or libertarian groups could stop them. Business leaders had written President Bush on December 21, 2001, asking him to help bring legislation such as Davis-Moran before Congress: "We seek your administration's support in bringing such comprehensive legislation... to the floors of the House and Senate as soon as possible."

Meanwhile, the press and media groups mounted a campaign of their own. A July 17, 2002, editorial in *The Washington Post* argued, under the headline "Security, Not Secrecy": "Merely by labeling their own information as sensitive, companies might avoid public disclosure... This material would then presumptively become unavailable to regulators in enforcement actions—unless they could show they had obtained it independently—and to the public and private litigants as well. No law should put in the hands of a regulated party the power—by turning over information—to preclude government's use of that information for legitimate law enforcement purposes." 🖊

Editor's note: Joe Davis, editor of the Metcalf Institute/SEJ/RTNDF *TipSheet*, is a member of SEJ's First Amendment Task Force.

SEJ Conference (from p.1)

Asked why editors around the country should free-up their reporters to spend time and money at the meeting, veteran *Baltimore Sun* environmental reporter-turned-editor Tim Wheeler says the main attraction is "important stories in the news agenda and on the political agenda.

"They'll get a good backgrounding on the stories that have been in the news and will be in the news in the coming year," says Wheeler, 2002 conference chair.

Wheeler says the overall agenda for the Baltimore meeting "is taken pretty much from what's been in the headlines for the past six months, and what will be in the headlines for the next six months." He points to several sessions as illustrating what he sees as the timeliness of the conference:

- an energy security and environment tour of a coal-fired power plant, with reviews of the Bush Administration's controversial Clean Air Act "new source review" regulations and of its "Clear Skies" proposals;
- a tour of Constellation Energy's nuclear power plant at Calvert Cliffs, Md.;
- a session on the military's role in environmental cleanups, and also on efforts by the military establishment to be exempted from some environmental regulations;
- sessions on issues ranging from urban pollution in Baltimore and along the District of Columbia's Anacostia River, which traverses some of the city's poorest neighborhoods...to the role of environmental issues in the following month's mid-term elections.

"There's always a tension with these things," Wheeler says, underscoring ongoing efforts to keep conference events timely and yet a need to firm-up details well in advance. "We face all of the post-September 11 challenges and also the first SEJ conference since the onset of the recession."

To ensure that the program provides value to increasingly bottom-line oriented news organizations, he says the programs have been designed to help reporters "go home with a story" if

they want to. "We're designing these tours, and also the plenaries and panels, so they could be the basic outline, if not a complete story," Wheeler said.

He said individual sessions on environmental reporting "craft" issues aim to meet the needs not only of print reporters, who traditionally make up the vast bulk of SEJ conference registrants, but also of broadcast reporters and book and "other" authors.

Are Some Issues 'Too Hot' to Cover?

A "Taboos of Environmental Reporting" Friday morning plenary session will explore whether some issues, for whatever reasons, are "too hot" for mainstream coverage.

"Are population control and consumption taboo subjects because of pressure from corporate bosses," the SEJ program brochure asks, "or do journalists shy away from them because they're too complicated, too big, too far out? Should we be doing more on these topics, and how can we tackle them in ways that are clear, compelling, and not sensationalistic?"

SEJ and its conference planners go into the October Baltimore meeting with a history of well-attended and generally well-received national conferences. They go into this fall's meeting hoping their organization's members and other reporters and editors will reply as they assume the child pictured on the front of their brochure would when asked the importance of the beat. The child—in a photograph from a *Baltimore Sun* series on lead poisoning—is shown grasping a paint-peeling railing under an "Ask this child" subhead.

With Baltimore hotel room rates high compared with rates in many parts of the country (\$159 for single, double, triple, or quad! At the Wyndham), SEJ is helping facilitate a room-sharing initiative, and its SEJ membership registration rate of \$145 (by an August 16 reduced-registration cutoff) is the same as last year's.

Up-to-date information on the conference program and recently added speakers is available online (www.sej.org). 🖊

READING RACK (from p. 3)

“As Maps and Reports Are Locked Up, a Debate Is Unleashed,” *Newark Star-Ledger*, July 18, 2002: Give reporter Robert Schwaneberg (and his newspaper) at least this much: he is one of the few in the United States with the courage or interest to tell his readers that there is information critical to their survival, which he may soon be unable to tell them about. New Jersey, which has lots of chemical plants, was one of the first states to adopt its own chemical “Right-to-Know” law after the 1984 Bhopal disaster killed thousands of Indians unaware of the hazards they were living next to. Federal laws were also adopted—which pushed industries to make themselves safer. Now, Schwaneberg reports, New Jersey Gov. James E. McGreevey is declaring secret not only chemical “risk management plans,” but “bridge surveys, building plans showing ventilation systems, maps detailing expected flooding from dam bursts, and the locations of pipelines, low-level radioactive waste, warehouses of toxic chemicals—even farms.” His article airs a debate among company and government officials over the risks and benefits of disclosure—a subject most American media find less newsworthy than updates on celebrity drug rehabs.

“Rethinking the Think Tanks,” *Sierra Magazine*, July/August 2002: Former legislative aide Curtis Moore is hardly your typical journalist—but he tells a story in this unabashedly environmentalist magazine that is very important and has gone largely ignored in the “legitimate” media. He details the political influence of Koch Industries, owned by reclusive billionaire brothers Charles and David Koch, the nation’s second-largest privately owned oil company, with revenues of more than \$30 billion a

year. The Kochs (along with other major corporations, many publicly held) funnel money into conservative think tanks like the Cato Institute and Citizens for a Sound Economy who bathe Congress and the media in a constant stream of policy papers praising the merits of a free market over environmental regulations or (get this) tighter fuel economy standards. Moore’s point is that such think tanks are merely a way of laundering the money that buys corporate propaganda. Moore has long been an unabashed advocate himself, dating from his days as staff to Senator Robert Stafford (R-Vt) on the Environment and Public Works Committee. It is precisely because of his engagement that he knows so much of how real politics works and how the media are duped and manipulated by bogus “experts.” Mainstream and “legitimate” media rarely seem to be aware of the ways interest groups are manipulating them—much less to talk about it. Moore knows and tells.

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