

Project Smart Vote educates callers

By Tammy Batey
Emerald Associate Editor

Political apathy may soon be a thing of the past. The Center for National Independence in Politics helps arm voters with up-to-date information about the candidates through Project Vote Smart.

Voters can call the Project Vote Smart hotline at 1-800-786-6885 and ask questions about the candidates' biographies, campaign finances, voting records on key issues, performance evaluations by 60 competing special interest groups and county election office addresses and telephone numbers.

Bruce Franklin, project supervisor and volunteer coordinator, said the hotline is an enormous success. The hotline receives more calls than the operators can handle, he said. The true key to the hotline's success, however, is the thousands of voters who are now informed about the candidates and the issues.

"The whole premise of the project is to create an ease of access for voters," Franklin said. "We arm them with information rather than who slept

with who. (The hotline) gives them a chance to pin these guys down."

Each of the operators, about 40 at any given time, answers callers' questions using a computer, which contains all the candidate information, said Renee Harber, assistant director of public information. A majority of the 200 total volunteers are college interns from Oregon State University.

CNIP test ran the hotline in 1990 in Nebraska and North Carolina, Harber said. The test run produced an encouraging response from voters he said.

Project founders were expressing frustration at the focus on the candidates' personalities or emotional appeal rather than on issues, Harber said.

"It's a program against the manipulative tactics candidates use with voters," she said.

The organization's \$1.5 million budget is funded by donations and foundations. CNIP does not take donations from government entities or any groups or organizations that lobby government and will not endorse or lobby for any candidates or causes.

PGE should scrap plan, executive says

By Pat Malach
Emerald Editor

An executive of the only nuclear power plant to be shut down by voters expressed doubts about Portland General Electric's plan for a four-year phase out of the Trojan Nuclear Plant.

Ed Smeloff, a member of the board of the Sacramento Municipal Utility District, said retention of plant personnel and reluctance to invest in necessary repairs for a short-lived plant will be major problems faced by PGE while trying to keep Trojan open until 1996.

Smeloff made his comments during a press conference Wednesday at the local headquarters of the Do It Yourself Committee, which is sponsoring an initiative that would close down Trojan immediately. California residents voted to close the Rancho Seco Nuclear Power Plant in 1989 when Smeloff was board president of SMUD.

"Prior to the closing of Rancho Seco, we encountered a number of difficulties at that plant," Smeloff said. "We encountered a problem with retaining key personnel. It was very difficult keeping top management. We lost a number of our key engineers. We had to invest considerable sums of money in long-term retention contract with key personnel."

Smeloff said moral among plant workers was also exceptionally poor prior to the plant's closure.

"I would urge the utility here to think very seriously about what this issue means," he said. "Also, beyond plant personnel, there's the issue of capital improvements in the plant. A nuclear plant must operate as safely on its last day as it does on its first day. We were investing on the average \$30 to \$40

million a year in capital improvements at Rancho Seco."

Smeloff continually stressed that PGE should be using its available resources to seek out new sources of energy to replace Trojan.

"The utility at Portland is striking out in a bold new direction," he said. "They are planning to make (\$500 million) investment in energy efficiency improvements. They're also going to build some new power plants."

"They need to put all of their resources, time, energy and senior-management talent in that no direction. I have seen what happens when you try to go two directions at once with a utility. To try and nurse the plant a long for four years and go in a new direction will be very difficult for plant management."

Smeloff said PGE's best option would be to purchase from other utilities any power lost by shutting down Trojan until new energy sources can be found. He said because California's peak energy consumption months are during the summer, and the Northwest peaks during the winter, there would be plenty of utilities willing to sell surplus power.

"(PGE) should go out and see what the markets will bring in terms of cost, and then factor in those costs with the costs of operating the plant," he said. "The one thing I do know from experience, is power purchases from other utilities ... are far more reliable and less risky than trying to operate a nuclear power plant — particularly one that's had such a troubled past history."

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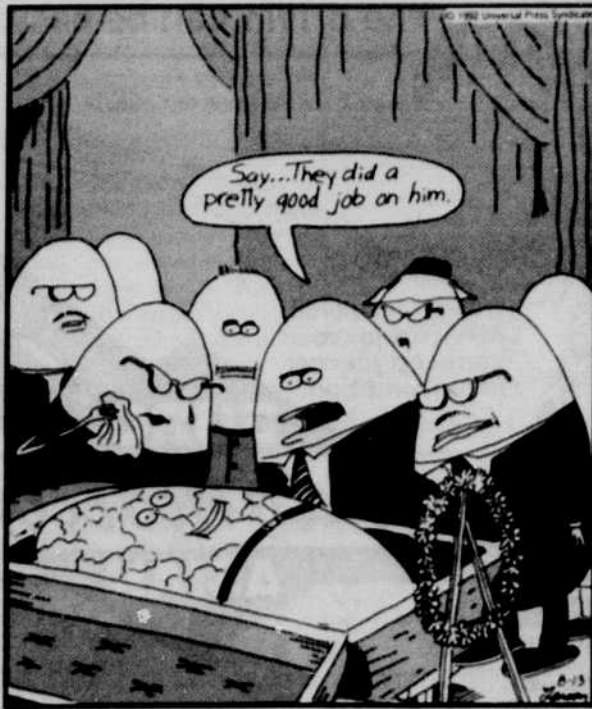
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By GARY LARSON



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