

Public should pick greater of two evils

With temperatures in the nation's capital hovering around the freezing point, it seems that President Clinton will be needing some winter clothes.

Perhaps he should consider the scandal-proof vest he wore during the 1992 campaign.

With a couple of new scandals circulating in Washington (not to mention on late night TV circuit), the president may find himself once again in need of the same mystical protection that preserved the respectability of his candidacy just two years ago.

Although the old allegations of pot-smoking have not been resurrected, two of the other accusations that surfaced in the '92 campaign have been brought back for an encore: philandering and improper financial dealings.

The first of these charges, philandering, springs from a recent incident in which Clinton was seen in a car with a woman other than his wife (gasp!) — weak evidence for a weaker claim which may not deserve to be public knowledge at all, even if it's true. Naturally, this is the scandal which has captivated the media, and in all likelihood, the public as well.

Getting lost in the shuffle is a more important scandal. It concerns Clinton's relationship with the failed Madison Savings and Loan, which was run by close associate James McDougal in Clinton's home state of Arkansas. Investigators are trying to determine whether some of the funds from the S&L were diverted either to Whitewater Development Corp., in which Clinton invested, or Clinton's 1984 gubernatorial campaign.

As is so often the case with stories that are vital to the public interest, Clinton's involvement with Madison S&L lacks a certain degree of sensationalism and has therefore failed to interest as many people as it ought to. Whether Clinton may possibly have been with a woman who might not have been his wife has been both news and entertainment, to the satisfaction of conservative pundits and stand-up comics everywhere.

The difference in reactions to these scandals illustrates a continuing problem in this country. If the story's more appropriate for Ted Koppel than for David Letterman, no one pays attention.

Whose fault is that ... the media's or the public's? Well, that question is yet another variation on the chicken-or-the-egg debate, media-style. Do the media cater to the lowest common denominator just for sales and ratings, or do they merely respond to a public that will no longer accept anything else?

But that's another issue. The matter at hand calls for a definite course of action: Americans should interest themselves in all the investigations of their president, but should try to exercise a little judgment in prioritizing those investigations. Cheating on Hillary might be interesting news — if it were true — but receiving money illegally from the Madison S&L would demonstrate a disregard for the law that would cast serious doubt on Clinton's fitness for office.

Of course, it's quite possible that both the allegations are untrue, or they may be so exaggerated as to be irrelevant. In any case, the public should keep a watchful but discriminating eye.



OPINION

Corn flakes and radioactive milk



ROBBIE REEVES

Take another look at your breakfast cereal this morning. You might be part of another government experiment.

Various departments in the federal government have recently admitted to having conducted numerous studies over the past 40 years to determine the effects of radiation on humans.

The fact that people were used by the government for allegedly medical research isn't unusual. The odd part about these tests was that many of the participants didn't know that they had volunteered. Some of the tests involved uninformed people who had not consented.

And some of these tests were rather bizarre.

A group of developmentally disabled students in a Massachusetts state institution was fed cereal with radioactive milk for several years in the 1940s and 1950s. The children were fed this without either their consent or that of their parents.

Over 100 inmates from penitentiaries in the Northwest were paid \$5 a month during the 1960s and 1970s to have their testes shot with X-rays. This was brought on by an accident at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation (another productive use of radiation in America), after which scientists decided that they needed more information about the harmful effects of radioactivity on humans.

(As a side note, all of the inmates that participated in the program had to get vasectomies upon leaving, to guard against genetic mutations and the like. Just in case you were wondering...)

These almost sound like stories from the *National Enquirer* or something that one might see on afternoon TV talk shows ("Today on Oprah, parents who claim that their children were fed radioactive cereal for breakfast ..."), but they actually come from a source that is often a little less believable — the United States government.

If these tests seem outrageous

enough, just wait. There's more.

Other revelations that have come out recently include stories about people (including probably non-consenting newborn babies) who were paid to be injected with quantities of plutonium and radioactive iodine, and veterans being exposed to forms of radiation in Veterans Administration hospitals.

The number of "participants," or, in many cases, victims, of these tests has exceeded 800 people, and the list grows with each new revelation on the evening news.

And, to top it all off, an expert involved in the testing commented that the experimentation on humans with radiation had "a little of the Buchenwald touch," referring to a Nazi concentration camp where experiments were conducted.

One could say that. In fact, it has a lot of the Buchenwald touch. One would think that the horrors of, among other things, the "medical" experiments on people in the Nazi concentration camps would still be fresh in the minds of those in the government just a few years after the war ended. Evidently, the government didn't quite remember.

To its credit, the government has taken action to inform Americans about the experiments — a bold step for the Clinton administration, considering the fact that the last few presidents have chosen to ignore the information that they had at their disposal.

Both the Department of Energy and the Veterans Administration have established toll-free telephone hotlines that concerned citizens can call. The phone lines have apparently been busy lately, with hundreds of people calling in to see what might have happened to them.

Secretary of Energy Hazel O'Leary has even stated that the government should apologize to the people that were involved in the experiments and to maybe give them a little monetary compensation for the testing.

However, no amount of compensation from the government can justify why hundreds of non-consenting (and in many cases, probably unwilling) people were subjected to secret tests by the government.

True, with the advent of the Cold War and the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the scientific

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community wanted to know more about the mysterious science of radiation. But the fact that a group of scientists (and the government which, of course, was paying for all of these tests) wanted to know, doesn't give them license to find out by using anyone and everyone as a proverbial guinea pig.

The damage from the experiments, both physically (for the victims) and mentally (for anyone that wonders why the government would do this to its own citizens), has already been caused.

Life goes on for the hundreds that were subjected to these experiments, as they are left to wonder if they will suffer from cancer or another ailment related to these tests, at some point in their lifetime. Some have probably already died from cancer brought on by tests that they never even knew about.

And even if they hadn't been used in the tests, Americans will continue to wonder what their government has done, and continues to do to them, for whatever reason that it finds justifiable.

If nothing else, Americans might wonder why their tax dollars are being spent to make glow-in-the-dark radioactive milk for children or to zap prison inmates in the balls — all in the name of science.

The irony with the radiation testing is that the government, in many cases covertly and without consent of many of the people involved, harmed hundreds (and possibly thousands) of people in an effort to save people from two ultimately lethal situations: nuclear accidents and nuclear war.

What can be done now? Perhaps the outrage of Americans will convince the government that these types of activities are intolerable and must be stopped.

Corn flakes, anyone?

Robbie Reeves is a columnist for the Emerald.

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