

Gov. Huntsman gives the people a voice in Divine Strake



BARB GUY

The federal government recently put on “public information sessions” to feign interest in Utahns’ opinions on the proposed Divine Strake weapons test.

At these sessions, written comments were accepted but there was no forum for people to verbalize their thoughts, except privately to a stenographer. This process denied participants the opportunity to stand and speak their minds. While that’s truly insidious, the most evil and clearly calculated result of the sessions’ format is that people were robbed of the privilege of hearing the comments of others.

Written comments do have their place. In fact, they could trigger the preparation of an environmental impact statement, which would at least significantly delay the test. (Letters will be accepted until Feb. 7 at NNSA/NSO, Divine Strake, PO

Box 98518, Las Vegas, NV,
89193-8518 or
divinestrake@nv.doe.gov.)

But movements for social change can only develop when we hear each other. They do not come from any one person’s thoughts, written on a piece of paper and headed for a silent pile on a bureaucrat’s desk.

That’s what Gov. Jon Huntsman knew when he held true public hearings on Divine Strake. He knew earlier federally sponsored sessions lacked that special fraternity, cohesion, alchemy and synergy that can come from a group of concerned people when they are allowed to interact.

And when that magic happens, committed people can bring about change. They can move mountains. They can even keep governments from moving mountains.

That’s why at the Salt Lake hearing last Wednesday, nearly everyone who rose to speak took a moment of their allotted two minutes to thank the governor. Many also thanked Dianne Nielson, executive director of Utah’s Department of Environmental Quality, who sat and listened intently and politely to each and every comment.

A transcript of all those comments will soon be available on the department’s Web site

and will be forwarded to the federal folks who ran the previous silent sessions.

I want to step aside early this time to make room for some citizen remarks, condensed by me, from the governor’s Salt Lake City hearing.

BARB GUY is a regular contributor to these pages. © Salt Lake Tribune.

SIDEBAR: Citizens speak out against Divine Strake

The following statements were made at the hearing sponsored Wednesday by Gov. Jon Huntsman in Salt Lake City on the planned Divine Strake weapon test:

“I was blood tested and tattooed along with my classmates by the government so they could monitor the effects of testing. I’m not interested in going through this again. I’ll lie in the road if I have to. The trucks will have to run me over.”

Michelle Bird

“It’s empowering to hear everybody’s personal stories. To those worried about being emotional: We need to be emotional. Write letters and make phone calls. This is a too-familiar road we’re traveling down.”

Cindy Bur

“I’d like to talk about U.S. leadership - or lack thereof. At a time when there are legitimate fears about nuclear-weapons programs in Iran and North Korea, at a time when just last week the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moved their clock a few minutes closer to midnight, at a time when U.S. credibility

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around the globe is at its lowest ebb, it's critically important the U.S. not take this action. As several others have said tonight, it's not divine, it's not rational, it's not necessary."

George Cheney

"The public can demand an Environmental Impact Statement and I hope that's something everyone will do. An EIS finally gives the public a say, but if people don't request it, it won't happen."

Michael Cowley

"I'm confused. An agency I've never heard of has a \$2 billion-plus budget. Why isn't this money being spent better elsewhere? A bunch of guys just want to set off firecrackers."

Terry Crowther

"I'm a downwinder. My life has been shaped by what happened to me at the hands of my government. I have thyroid cancer and I lost a sister to lupus. In the neighborhood I grew up in I've counted 45 people who died of fallout-related illnesses. We traded our trust for our lives. We won't do it again."

Mary Dickson

"I believe we should use our resources, our science and our technologies to fund and explore options for peace rather than more options for war."

Monica Dixon

"I've had two miscarriages [the five other women in my family have had none]. The only difference was my address was Moab and theirs was Michigan. The government can't predict what dose of radiation downwind populations may receive nor how many cancers and miscarriages it will cause. There is no such thing as an acceptable dose."

Susan Dolan

"It's been my honor to listen to this testimony. I, too, went to the so-called hearing the government offered; it was a sales pitch for this disaster. It's ironic that [tonight's testimony will] be put on the Department of Environmental Quality Web site the same week the

Legislature votes to cut their funding, in a year when we have a \$1.6 billion surplus. When we pull the rug out from under the guardians, who will protect us?"

Ed Firmage Jr.

"I find Divine Strake to be totally counterproductive. We cannot blast our way to world cooperation."

Naomi Franklin

"For 25 years I've been attending hearings about nuclear this and nuclear that. I'd like to say no, no nuclear anything."

Meg Hards

"My husband and I, along with our children, moved to Cedar City in 1951. Our son Norman died at 42 of cancer. My son Paul died a horrible death at 55 from leukemia; my husband died three weeks later. These deaths were diagnosed as cancer from overexposure to radiation. Divine Strake is wrong and we need to stop it. I don't know how, but I know we must."

Lois Iverson

"This testing will begin an escalation impossible to stop."

Janie Iwamoto

"I was raised by a uranium-mining and hauling family. I've watched loved ones take their last breath and die of cancer related to radiation exposure. In the names of those I have buried, please do not allow these losses to be wasted."

Collette Johnston

"Here we are at the threshold of a decision. Do we walk back into weapons development with its environmental, health and ethical quandaries, or do we step into the future and make a stand for public health, well-being and peaceful diplomatic solutions? These choices define our character."

Tara Maher

"Developing and testing new weapons won't make our global community any safer; rather it will fuel continued violence and resentment toward the

U.S. Let's put our resources toward true tools of peace."

Shea Pickelner

"I grew up without grandparents - they died of cancer and we received "compensation" which is a horrible, horrible word - so I grew up without anyone older than my parents, as did many my age in St. George. I want to add that story of suffering to the many that have been said."

Katie Savage

"My father died from multiple myeloma as a downwinder. They offered us compensation but no one can compensate for my father. We need to stand up and be noted and have the courage to say, 'I will not allow it again.' I hope we can get enough strength going between all of us."

Barbara Stratton

"I want to remind people about a victory: MX missile. We fought it tirelessly and eventually the government conceded. We stopped MX; we can stop Divine Strake."

Robert Volker

"I have a 1-year-old daughter; I'm here as momma bear. I love this state an awful lot. Every time I go camping I wonder am I camping on top of uranium tailings. I love gardening and I don't want to be afraid to grow food. I don't want to be afraid to drink water, or to breathe. We should just redraw the borders of Utah into the shape of a giant guinea pig."

Kerri Warner

In tests they exposed sheep to the same radiation downwinders received. The sheep died. I just want the federal government to know that we aren't your sheep.

[name unknown]