

Sen. Goldwater On SST

Editor, the Citizen:

It is regrettable that Sen. Goldwater did not check with me before writing his syndicated column that appeared in the March 30 Citizen, since I could have explained that, in attacking my March 2 Congressional testimony on potential skin cancer hazards from SST operations, he was drawing upon other testimony that contained an extremely large error.

Sen. Goldwater cited the congressional testimony of my respected fellow-scientist, Dr. William W. Kellogg of the National Center for Atmospheric Research. Dr. Kellogg had suggested that one could compensate for my estimated 6 percent SST-increase of risk of skin cancer by merely staying out of the sun about one day out of a lifetime. Dr. Kellogg went on to give alternate interpretations of how often bikini-clad girls would need to cover up with bathrobes to secure the same risk-compensation, and so on.

Through a serious misinterpretation of my figures, Dr. Kellogg had made an error of one thousand (underestimating the risks by that factor) in his testimony. I discussed his fallacy before a group of about 40 scientists who were assembled in Boulder, Colo., on March 18 by the Department of Commerce Technical Advisory Board to assess potential SST environmental hazards. Dr. Kellogg was in that audience and conceded that he had been off by a factor of a thousand in his congressional testimony, the testimony which led Sen. Goldwater to assert in his recent column that I was raising "an outlandish" possibility and therein doing "a disservice to laymen."

Although I took pains to describe as approximate all of the analyses that went into my congressional testimony warning of the possibility of a significant SST effect on skin cancer incidence, I must stress that my arguments and my figures had been previously discussed with a large number of bio-medical scientists around the country, as well as with many meteorologists and physicists. The hazards seemed sufficiently great to warrant my congressional testimony.

If there has been any real disservice to laymen in all of this, perhaps it has been done by persons who jumped somewhat too quickly to the conclusion that these hazards represented some sort of "numbers game," some sort of irresponsible alarmism. Far from it, I fear.

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