readers may sometimes feel that there is too little thinking going on as to what gets in or does not get in the paper.

First, there was no attempt to stack the deck. Some 20 minutes before deadline, the layout person for Sunday's Opinion section learned that the obituaries would not fill all of the 2½ pages that had been set aside for them. Therefore, the space would have to be filled with opinions and syndicated columnists. Under the "facetiously sarcastic" e-mails and faxes about Paige's (assorted expletives) retraction.

Whew! Let's all just exhale. We have eight more days to go.

The Reader Advocate's phone number is (801) 257-8999. Write to the Reader Advocate, The Salt Lake Tribune, P.O. Box 867, Salt Lake City, Utah 84110. E-mail: reader.advocate@sltrib.com.

2/17/02 S.L. Tribune

Tiny ISU Nuclear Reactor Is No Threat to Public

BY JAY F. KUNZE

I was shocked and disappointed to read the article published in the Feb. 10 edition of your newspaper titled "Idaho State University's Lax Policies Pose a Nuclear Security Threat." The article was written by Kevan Crawford and alleges that Idaho State University (ISU) engaged in various criminal and fraudulent actions in relation to its non-power reactor. I am disappointed not only by the libelous and outrageous nature of Crawford's statements, but also that *The Tribune* chose to print them. Even if this particular forum is intended to be an "anything goes" medium, the inflammatory headline was surely written by *The Tribune* staff.

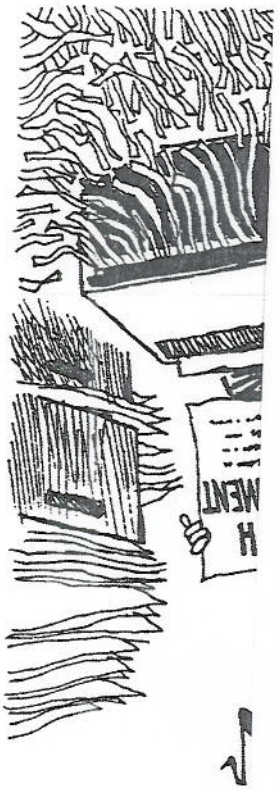
Lest your readers envision a "Hanford-type" nuclear reactor, they should know that the reactor at ISU is a small, low-power training reactor donated to the university in the 1960s by a contractor of the Department of Energy to be used in connection with ISU's Nuclear Engineering and Science program for training students and conducting basic reactor physics and irradiation experiments. The sub-critical facility associated with the reactor develops no measurable power. Both are benign nuclear devices, safe to operators, students and the public. The reactor is limited to power no more than that of a standard incandescent night light or a single Christmas tree bulb.

The facilities at ISU are regulated by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and are inspected by their officers on a regular basis. In 1993 the NRC did issue the notice of violation referred to by Crawford, and ISU immediately responded by taking corrective action in all areas noted. None of them resulted in any criminal or civil penalties.

These corrective actions were followed up with inspections by the NRC, and ISU remains in compliance today. ISU's policy and practice, then and now, is to take safety and security seriously, and to vigilantly strive to remain in compliance with applicable regulations and safety standards.

We unequivocally reject the assertion by Crawford that either the NRC or ISU are lax in their enforcement or compliance with applicable regulations and safety standards or that ISU has engaged in any criminal or fraudulent conduct in relation to its nuclear reactor. Our security plan is periodically reviewed both by the NRC and in-house, and since 9-11 the facility has been under heightened security, as have all nuclear facilities in the nation.

Finally, your readers should also know that Crawford's motives and current knowledge of ISU's program are suspect. He is a dismissed former employee who was last employed at ISU in January 1994. How he purports to have the kind of current information allowing him to conclude that "some violations [of the USNRC] undoubtedly continue to this day" is anyone's guess. The truth is the ISU facility represents no danger to ISU personnel or the public.

As noted, the NRC does regularly inspect ISU's facility, and the regulatory issues that occurred while Crawford was affiliated with ISU, even as the reactor supervisor, were addressed long ago. We have endured Crawford's vitriolic diatribes for years, and one would hope he would move on to something more substantive and productive, although based on experience, he will probably only see this response itself as further confirmation of his "conspiracy" beliefs.

Jay F. Kunze is dean of the College of Engineering at Idaho State University.