

Fat Lady singing same old song

By John Butwell
Statewide columnist

The generation before me grew up without television. They listened to George Burns and Gracie Allen, the Lone Ranger and Tonto, on the radio instead of watching TV.

Born in 1958, I grew up taking television for granted. It had *always* existed, as far as I was concerned.

Now, color television was different. It was a new development that I remember coming along when I was in grade school.

When I was in kindergarten, all television was black-and-white except for the occasional program in color which NBC, in particular, promoted with its rainbow-feathered peacock logo.

But TV itself was always there, "as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be."

For today's children, computers and the Internet have "always existed." They never have known a time without them.

But unfortunately, Kentucky kids (and even young adults) also have never known a time when a debate wasn't raging over how to destroy deadly nerve gas stored at the Army's Bluegrass Depot between Berea and Richmond.

Just as unfortunately, this generation of Kentuckians *also* has never known a time when the Army wasn't lying about its intentions concerning nerve gas disposal.

Two years ago, community activists who opposed construction of a nerve gas incinerator at the depot celebrated a "victory."

Supposedly, the Army had selected an alternative, "closed loop" disposal method to neutralize the stuff without releasing toxic byproducts and actual nerve gas through incinerator smokestacks and dis-



No Secrets

charge pipes....

Releases that repeatedly occurred at the Army's nerve gas incinerators in Tooele, Utah, and Johnston Atoll in the South Pacific.

But as the old saying goes, it ain't over until the fat lady sings. And now the fat lady, A.K.A. the U.S. Army, is singing a different tune.

Faced with the enormous cost of the war in Iraq, the Army says it can't afford to build a \$2 billion closed-loop disposal facility in Kentucky.

Instead, the fat lady wants to ship the nerve gas stored here to its newly-opened incinerator in Anniston, Ala. -- a tune that would risk the lives of an enormous "audience" along the route.

The fat lady's latest lyrics are inconsistent with logic, critics point out. They just don't make sense.

First, we invaded Iraq to destroy weapons of mass destruction, including nerve gas, that either didn't exist or couldn't be found.

Now, due to the cost of the war that resulted from our invasion, we supposedly "can't afford" to destroy the WMDs that have existed in our own back yard since the presidency

The Fat Lady could sing either of Stephen Foster's two most famous songs in reference to destroying Kentucky's nerve gas stockpile.

She could croak "Oh, Susanna," with its illogical contradictions ("rained all night the day I left, the weather was so dry" and "it was so hot, I froze to death") leading up to being "bound for Alabama."

Or, she could croon "My Old Kentucky Home" where, if nerve gas were destroyed safely, the sun would shine bright -- and construction of a neutralization facility would create jobs as a side benefit.

Weep no more, my lady! Neutralize the nerve gas right here in the Bluegrass and end the decades of perpetual risk to all the downwind counties, including Jackson County

of John Fitzgerald Kennedy....

Since Howdy Doody, Beaver Cleaver, Mister Ed, Perry Mason, "Gunsmoke," "Bonanza" and "I Love Lucy."

But in one sense, the fat lady is being perfectly harmonious with herself.

She's been singing in the key of D-ception all along, and her basic plan has never wavered.

Fat Lady wants to ship or incinerate nerve gas. (First she tried to ship it by rail, back in the 1970s, and dump it in the sea, but neither the public nor contemporary politicians stood still for that.)

Either way, she does *not* want to neutralize it in a closed-loop facility.

Furthermore, she wants to build as few incinerators as possible, so more money will be left over for current weapon systems (instead of obsolete ones like those pesky nerve gas rockets) ... and, of course, the salaries of generals.

Way back when Fat Lady was proposing to build an incinerator here in the Bluegrass, she promised that she would *only* burn the nerve gas already stored here, and then tear the facility down.

She wouldn't ship any in. She wouldn't *dream* of it. Scout's honor, honest Injun, cross her heart and hope to die.

But now that construction of an incinerator here in Kentucky has been blocked, she wants to ship our nerve gas to Alabama and burn it there.

Kind of makes you wonder what Fat Lady had in mind for Kentucky all along, doesn't it?

Fat Lady first strained her vocal cords -- not to mention her credibility -- back in the 1970s, when she let some "screen smoke" go drifting off the depot in the middle of the night into Fariston, a nearby Madison County community.

Fat Lady screamed that "student radicals" at Berea College were to blame for the harsh smoke that drifted into low-income homes and lungs during that incident, and sent dozens of people to the hospital.

The only trouble was, "student radicals" don't have "screen smoke," and the college didn't have any really "radical" students. Fat Lady herself was the one putting up a P.R. "smokescreen."

And over the decades, Fat Lady's credibility hasn't gotten any better. You'd think she'd learn, but she *still* doesn't know the score.

I'm not talking about our men and women risking their lives to serve our country, by the way. I'm talking about the fat-cat bureaucrats who don't seem to give the hind end of a rat-a-tat-tat for our country's best interests.

Most recently, Fat Lady was caught secretly budgeting money for a study of how nerve gas could be shipped out of the Bluegrass Depot to Alabama ... at the same time she was publicly claiming that she had

no intention of shipping the nerve gas out.

She wouldn't ship any out. She wouldn't *dream* of it. Scout's honor, honest Injun, cross her heart and hope to die.

Naughty, naughty Fat Lady. We, the people in your audience, pay your salary with our opera tickets (A.K.A. taxes). In fact, we're the board of directors of this silly soap opera. But still you sing and dance.

Not only have you delayed the destruction of a deadly threat to the people of Kentucky -- you're increasing the danger of nerve gas being used by terrorists all over the world.

The nerve gas here in Kentucky and elsewhere in the U.S.A. isn't the *only* nerve gas on this planet, Fat Lady. As you well know, our former enemies in the Cold War *also* amassed vast stockpiles of nerve gas to use against us.

The Soviet Union is no more. But its legacy lingers in those stockpiles, which the former Soviet republics have agreed to destroy by 2007 under an international treaty that the U.S. also has signed.

If we drag our feet about destroying our nerve gas, how can we hold our former enemies' feet to the fire about destroying theirs?

We'd lose all credibility -- but *that* has never seemed to bother you much, Fat Lady.

The scenario could get worse. Some of the former Soviet republics have Islamic

separatist movements that undoubtedly sympathize with Qaeda.

If *those* terrorists get their hands on nerve gas because their national government unprovoked by the U.S., he failed to destroy it -- well, could face a very serious military problem, Fat Lady....

One that would make a threat that was posed: Saddam Hussein look like teen-ager playing with his Box, by comparison.

Surely, if we can afford to spend \$100 billion on our national security in Iraq, we can afford to spend \$2 billion on our security here in Kentucky. Surely -- we can't afford to.

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