

## Nuclear nightmare must not be relived

*" . . . he saw there were about 20 men, and that they were all in exactly the same nightmarish state: their faces were wholly burned, their eye sockets were hollow, the fluid from their melted eyes had run down their cheeks. . . "*

By NAN GROGAN ORROCK and REGINA THOMAS

These searing images of horror from John Hersey's powerful book, "Hiroshima," remain an unforgettable memory of the reality of atomic warfare. Each year Georgians of every religious denomination gather in Atlanta to remember the unthinkable, when human beings dropped atomic bombs on their own kind, the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 58 years ago.

They will gather again tonight at the King Center to memorialize human folly and to float Japanese lanterns bearing messages of peace on the reflecting pool there, yards from the grave of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

But this year we are haunted by a new nightmare. To date, what has perhaps saved us from a repetition of the Hiroshima horrors has been our unwillingness to use atomic weapons despite an arsenal that provides the capability to annihilate cities like Hiroshima thousands of times over. Yet our current administration, under the hawkish watch of President Bush, Donald Rumsfeld and others, has not only the ability, but also apparently the willingness, to use nuclear weapons again.

The Bush administration, on behalf of the Department of Energy, has requested \$6.38 billion in the fiscal 2004 budget for nuclear weapons-related activities. A portion of that money, over the years more than \$4 billion, will be spent on construction of a so-called Modern Pit Facility to manufacture the plutonium triggers for those nuclear bombs. The plant would cost taxpayers an estimated \$300 million a year to operate.

The front-running site for the bomb factory is the Savannah River site, just across the Georgia line in Aiken, S.C., and already the source of ongoing contamination of the Savannah River on which it sits.

U.S. taxpayers are paying \$15.7 billion for nuclear weapons in fiscal 2004. Georgia taxpayers have run up \$403.9 million of that tab. For that same amount of money, 221,341 Georgia children could receive health care.

The Savannah River, critical to Georgia's water needs, is already contaminated with tritium. The ground water beneath the Savannah River site is irreversibly contaminated; 33 million gallons of radioactive waste sit in corroding tanks and tritium has turned up in east Georgia well water, an alarming sign of possible seepage into our aquifers from the polluted site.

The tax dollars spent at the Savannah River site should be used for massive cleanup, providing thousands of jobs for Georgians and a hope for a reduction in the environmental threat of the decades-old pollution. Just last year, South Carolinians and Georgians had to lobby hard merely to keep the current cleanup budget from being cut by the president. We need cleanup at the Savannah River site instead of a costly new facility that creates more radioactive waste and new nuclear weapons.

As we recall the tragedy of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, let us be spurred to act now and prevent such madness from blighting human history once again.



State Rep. Nan Orrock (D-Atlanta, top) is House majority whip. State Sen. Regina Thomas (D-Savannah) chairs the Senate committee on institutions and properties