

May 14, 2001

To The Editor, The Chicago Tribune:

The Tribune's editorials favoring expansion of overcrowded, polluted, noisy, and dangerous O'Hare are unconscionable. Surely your editorial board knows that, after years of environmental abuse, O'Hare is a highly toxic site.

Studies from around the world, by many different sources, including states, countries, school districts, and communities, all show that airport and aircraft-generated pollution are potentially lethal to people who live and work even many miles from airports. Over the years, we have shared many of these documents with your editorial board and reporters, and a number of these studies are posted on our website for public viewing, www.areco.org.

Aviation emissions cause severe environmental problems, which create some of the most egregious public-health problems that we face today. More than 70% of our nation's population could be exposed to the toxic emissions emanating from airports and aircraft. O'Hare Airport, if not the number-one offender, is certainly at the top of the list.

A Los Angeles School District study found that small flight volumes of approximately fifteen jets per day are associated with a significant increase in cancer risk among residents living under the flight paths. At O'Hare, we have about 2,500 flights a day, or almost a million per year. The health of several million people could be affected by this one mega-airport alone.

In another editorial, you expressed concern about arsenic in ground water in outlying towns. Why, then, do you keep silent when you know about significant ground and surface water pollution from O'Hare? Your stance puts you on record as being anti-environmental. This precludes your taking a position to protect the environment on other issues without seeming hypocritical.

Your encouragement of the U.S. Senate to act unconstitutionally and to grab the governor's veto power on airport expansion was irresponsible and manipulative.

In order to truly alleviate O'Hare's problems, including delays, we must decrease flights to safer and healthier levels; promote alternative modes of mass transportation, such as a world-class high-speed rail system; and use high-tech business communication as a substitute for unnecessary travel so as not to overtax the least sustainable form of transport, aviation.

Senator Fitzgerald, Congress Hyde and Governor Ryan are courageous for standing up to special interest groups that favor expansion at any cost. We ask you to work with them to find lasting, long-term solutions that will not sacrifice the health, safety, and well-being of Northeastern Illinois residents.

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