

A Plea to Save the Voyager Mission

YOUR SPECIAL COVERAGE OF THE VOYAGER 1 spacecraft's journey out of the solar system was most welcome (Special Section: Voyager 1 crosses the termination shock, 23 Sept., pp. 2015–2029). The data now being received from the interstellar medium are, as the various articles show, valuable space science as well as testimony to a remarkable era of exploration.

How ironic and shortsighted it is that just as this happens, NASA has scheduled operation of the mission to cease. In order to save a couple of tenths of a percent of the cost, NASA would shut off the first interstellar spacecraft.

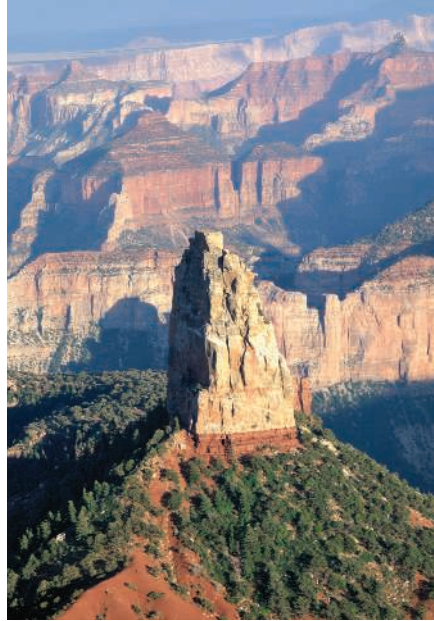
The Planetary Society just sent a petition signed by 10,000 people protesting this action to the Senate and House authorizing committees with jurisdiction over NASA, asking them to direct NASA to operate this mission. Those who read and enjoyed the special section on Voyager might want to add their names by writing to Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison and Representative Ken Calvert about Voyager.

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Revisiting the Grand Canyon

IT WAS WITH WISTFULNESS THAT I READ JOHN Schmidt's review of James Powell's book *Grand Canyon* ("The grand question," 16 Sept., p. 1818). I was a teenager in the late 1960s when my family took an epic car trip around the United States, visiting the Grand Canyon and many other national parks. As a budding naturalist, I was eager to hear the words of park rangers and avidly read interpretive material. I made lists of plants and animals and soaked up information about habitats, succession, geological change, and evolution. In a fit of nostalgia, I recently repeated the epic with my wife and two children, driving from Washington State to Florida, hitting as many of the parks as we could. The only place I could find scientific content was in the less visited parks that had not been remodeled in a while. The Grand Canyon was the most chilling. The modern visitor center was architecturally magnificent but intellectually vacuous. With open spaces and giant images, it emphasized only



Point Imperial, North Rim, Grand Canyon.

the aesthetic experience. There was homage to John Wesley Powell, the man who carried out early explorations of the canyon and helped found the U.S. Geological Survey and the National Geographic Society. Yet the principles he so strongly promoted—rationalism and scientific curiosity as a means of appreciating the world and improving human welfare—were being relegated to obscurity. Schmidt notes that on viewing the canyon we ask, "How did this happen?" The current displays and signage at the Grand Canyon do their best to avoid any such question. As we left the park, we stopped to watch the sunrise at Desert View, a popular site. The most prominent sign at the overlook addressed only the visual beauty of the canyon and the religious significance of a distant mountain to Native Americans. One paragraph began, "The landscape seems consciously designed."

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Déjà Vu All Over Again for Nuclear Power?

RECENT HEADLINES IN MANY NEWS SOURCES have proclaimed a revival for nuclear power. Eliot Marshall's article "Is the friendly atom poised for a comeback?" (News Focus, 19 Aug., p. 1168) poses the issue as a question rather than a conclusion, but nevertheless falls into step with the other sources by not mentioning the role of public acceptance in the fate of this tech-

nology. Three decades ago, Alvin Weinberg, then a leading spokesman for the technology, sagely observed: "The public perception and acceptance of nuclear power appears to be the question we missed rather badly in the very early days. This issue has emerged as the most critical question concerning the future of nuclear energy" [(1), p. 19].

A review of all available national surveys, not just general questions about the idea of nuclear electricity or about its future, indicates an American public who, although somewhat less opposed than in the past, is still not eager to build more nuclear power plants and is strongly opposed to having one sited in their community if they don't already have one. Even when asked whether they would favor nuclear power as a way of dealing with climate change, a majority remains opposed (2). Continued inattention to public acceptability has the very real potential of converting Weinberg's retrospection to a prescient forecast.

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References

1. A. Weinberg, *Am. Sci.* **64**, 16 (1976).
2. E. Rosa, *The Future of Social Acceptability of Nuclear Power in the United States* (Institute Français des Relations Internationales, Paris, 2004).

Issues Surrounding Nuclear Power

YOUR SERIES OF ARTICLES ON "RETHINKING nuclear power" (News Focus, 19 Aug., pp. 1168–1179) are a useful coverage of much of the reemerging nuclear debate, but they fall short with respect to two aspects.

Their emphasis, like the nuclear debate itself, is on a technical solution to greenhouse emissions. But climate change is only one symptom among many of excessive demands by humans on the natural environment. There are too many of us demanding too much from a finite planet. Emphasis on technical solutions to particular threats to the exclusion of an attack on the underlying causes ensures that these solutions are, at best, temporary, and, at worst, may lead to even more serious threats.

Although the misuse of nuclear knowledge and materials for war or terrorism is mentioned, the world context in which this might occur, and have to be countered, is envisaged as being much like today: reasonable economic buoyancy and inter-