

I was dismayed to read that Mr. Puga is giving private interest groups yet another year to raise funds to save the ASARCO smokestacks. Recall that past articles indicated that it would require \$14 million dollars to restore the stacks and then another \$100,000 dollars a year to maintain them. After hearing these figures, 80% of those polled at the time agreed that the stacks should come down. Realize that even now this venture is not just about private funds. What happens when the private sector's money runs out? Or they just decide to walk away? As Sunday's article clearly indicated, public funds will have to pick up the bill after we fought so hard to ensure that the already overburdened El Paso tax payer would not have to pay for ASARCO's mess. Keep in mind that the clean-up plan included the cost of demolishing the stacks at no additional cost to the local tax payer. But let's assume that this project was completely funded by the private sector. Is this enterprise really what the private sector wants to devote that kind of time and money to? In this economy? Seriously?

Think of the scholarships they could provide El Paso students with instead. Think of the many necessary repairs that this kind of money could provide for our elementary and high schools. Think of the utility services and basic living improvements that kind of money would mean for our *colonias*. Think of the occupation, health, and education causes that kind of money would provide many of our local non-profit organizations. Think of the small business opportunities even a million of those dollars might help a local entrepreneur realize. Think of the fine arts complex that El Paso Community College could build to support the talents of countless students who need resources to paint, sculpt, dance, act, or master a musical instrument, so that they may continue to preserve and engender the diverse creative culture we have here in El Paso. If I had that sort of motivation and funding, I would certainly prefer to see my name on a building that helps people realize their dreams or donated to organizations that create better livelihoods for our citizens than to two eyesore smokestacks that have poisoned our air for over 100 years. And, again as Sunday's article indicated, if these groups cut costs by cutting corners with safety protocols, (much like the reasoning of BP and Hurricane Katrina hindsight—"Oh that will never happen here,"), the stacks will continue to endanger the public. El Pasoans didn't need flood insurance either, right? Think an earthquake can't happen here? Think again. Just this past May El Paso registered four earthquakes at 4.2 in scale according to a seismologist at UTEP. Earthquake or not, Mr. Puga stressed the danger of what might happen if the stacks were not maintained properly. Why else would he want indemnity? And if/when this private enterprise fails, Mr. Puga and his clean-up money will be long gone, leaving the public once again holding the bag.

While I do believe that these groups believe in their heartfelt intentions to preserve the stacks' historical and cultural meaning, I do not believe that they have thoroughly thought through the future ramifications of their cause nor the contradictions in their arguments. For I am sympathetic to the cultural significance of the stacks, and I could almost buy into this part of the argument were it not at the expense of public safety and public coffers. ASARCO did not stay closed because we won a popularity contest or a public poll or even because of the emotional appeal of our arguments. We won because cost/benefit analysis and facts regarding environmental and public health were on our side. The same is true now whether you are for or against demolishing the stacks. Any other position contradicts the logic and ethos of the original argument to keep the plant closed. If you indeed care about this community and want to do something historically significant, rather than put our future welfare at risk,

support Mr. Puga's original plan or create a special exhibit for our history museum that documents the plant's significance, or even create a virtual tour to raise funds for more necessary and productive projects. As for the argument that the stacks will pay for themselves and attract businesses and tourists, reality check. Every visitor I've encountered, from environmentalists to engineers and artists, from such locales as L.A., Ohio, and Colorado, comments that we must live in an industrial area. Just last week, a man whom I met on the Taos plaza said, "Oh, El Paso, with those smokestacks, one of the ugliest cities I've ever been." We may assign beauty and meaning to the stacks, but many outsiders do not.

Just like our federal government, apparently special interest groups have lobbied Mr. Puga, and instead of raising money for projects that would actually benefit our community, these groups will continue their power play for ASARCO at the expense of public safety. I don't resent increased taxes for education, health care, or programs to create jobs, but I certainly resent this. Yet another example of how the regressive, financially irresponsible, and provincial thinking by a small segment of our populace is allowed to dominate over the progressive, practical, and generative vision that this town needs. Furthermore, as long as the smokestacks stand, the "wicked witch" is not dead, nor benign when it comes to our pocketbooks and the public's safety (by the way, I resent the sexist feminine imagery assigned to a clearly masculine icon). Please tell me that I misread the article when the forward vision of our developers is to attach advertisements to the smokestack—not literally attach, I hope, billboards up and down the 800 foot stack? If I did not, then clearly we are all still living in the land of Oz.

I can appreciate my neighbors' passion and devotion to preserving the cause of culture and history but not at the expense of public safety and funds that would build El Paso a better future. Up or down, I look forward to the day when the El Paso community will heal from this issue rather than continue to be divided over it.

One more thing: Mr. Steve Ortega, you've got my vote.

Lisa McNiel