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LETTERS

HAARP Facility in Alaska

Science 28 Mar 1997:



Summary

With respect to the News & Comment article “Ionosphere research lab sparks fears in Alaska” by Lisa Busch (21 Feb 1997, p. 1060), I would like to make two points:

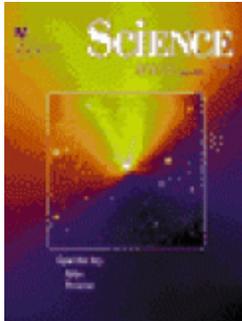


overestimated the power of the Gakona, Alaska, facility by a factor of more than a million and then used statements in patents (1) to fuel speculations on the part of the public about possible effects such as weather manipulations, mind warping, and communication disruptions. This incorrect information has been refuted in hearings in the Alaska legislature, in a video prepared by Senator Frank H. Murkowski (R-AK) for airing in Alaska, and at open-house sessions at the site for interested visitors.

Second, the Gakona site is now intended to be a world-class facility for studying the upper atmosphere, although the function has evolved from an over-the-horizon radar (never constructed), to a high-frequency facility (under construction) to generate ELF (Extremely Low Frequency) radio waves in the ionosphere, to a major center for upper atmosphere studies using a variety of diagnostics (some in place) with a powerful incoherent scatter radar (ISR) as the core instrument (to be constructed). The core instrument will join with existing ISRs at Svalbard and Tromsø in Norway; Sondrestrom, Greenland; and Boston, Massachusetts, and with the proposed ISR at Resolute Bay, Canada, to form an Arctic

network of radars to observe virtually the whole Polar Cap and to track disturbances produced by solar inputs in the form of waves and particles. The network will be a remarkable addition to the tools available to the atmospheric science community with applications to space weather, Arctic and satellite communications, and electric power-grid problems.

In the early days of the Arecibo Observatory in Puerto Rico there were concerns expressed about the facility, but these have long since been replaced by satisfaction with the scientific outcomes and the benefits to the local economy. The residents of Alaska will find similar benefits.



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