

OBITUARY

Paul Leventhal

Victor Gilinsky and Marvin Miller

Paul Leventhal died on April 10, 2007. He was best known as the president of the Nuclear Control Institute (NCI), a small research and advocacy center he founded in 1981 to combat nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism. Paul was a respected colleague and a good friend and we miss him.

Pound for pound NCI was the most effective center anywhere in the world in the fight against the spread of nuclear weapons. The key to its success was Paul's persistence in pursuing this goal, with a focus on eliminating the use of weapons-useable highly enriched uranium and plutonium from civilian nuclear programs in the U.S. and other countries. He was an effective and imaginative publicist and that effectiveness was based on a thorough knowledge of the subject at hand and the levers of power in Washington and other places. To help him, Paul brought in highly competent technical staff such as Ed Lyman, and also made good use of outstanding consultants: like the late Carson Mark, whose paper for NCI finally put to bed the longstanding argument about the usability of reactor-grade plutonium in weapons, and Eldon Greenberg, whose trenchant and influential legal analyses of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty helped prevent the Treaty's standards from being watered down.

NCI's success was also grounded in Paul's pre-NCI accomplishments in the domain of nuclear power and nuclear weapons, particularly his work as a Senate staffer in getting both the Energy Reorganization Act of 1974 and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act of 1978 enacted, and as co-director of the Senate investigation of the 1979 Three Mile Island nuclear accident. The latter left him acutely aware of the combination of human fallibility and mechanical failure that makes nuclear plants vulnerable to accidents and sabotage, and led to a lifelong concern about the potential for terrorists to both acquire weapons-useable materials from civilian nuclear facilities and to cause "deliberate accidents" with the release of significant amounts of radioactivity from such facilities, particularly power reactors. To focus attention on this subject, NCI convened an International Task Force on the Prevention of Nuclear Terrorism in 1986, long before the events of 9/11 raised the consciousness of the nonproliferation community about the seriousness of these threats.

Under Paul's leadership, NCI also organized other groundbreaking meetings, including an important conference in Montevideo, Uruguay that played a role in getting Brazil and Argentina to agree to a mutual nuclear inspection scheme, and another conference in 2001 where a stellar group of speakers debated the question of whether it's possible to have nuclear power without proliferation and terrorism. Unfortunately, this meeting was NCI's last hurrah: one of its principal foundation supporters went out of business and the other foundations lost interest in Paul's brand of nuclear activism. Understandably, he grew cynical and his humor became mordant. But he never gave up, focusing all his energy and acumen until the end on both old and new concerns, in particular the danger that the proposed U.S.–India agreement for civilian nuclear cooperation would undermine the nonproliferation regime, and the threat of Iranian nuclearization.

Paul had his foibles too, and his persistence sometimes made this maddening to his friends. But he was a *mensch*, a decent and warm guy who enjoyed being with family and friends but was driven to do what he thought was imperative for the world. He could be abrasive, but he always remained dignified, and he had the respect of people across the political spectrum. And he genuinely liked people across the spectrum, too. As a newspaper editorial put it, Paul Leventhal was an admirable man.