

# Opinion

# Shakespeare nails the Corps

About a quarter of a century ago, when I was fairly certain that I knew all there was to know about everything, my high school English teacher tossed me a curve ball via William Shakespeare.

As my fellow sophomore literature classmates and I read “Macbeth,” we were tasked to unravel Shakespeare’s simple phrase: “Nothing is but what is not.”

After a week of class debate, I settled on my answer — that in life you can only be certain of what does not exist. In other words, “nothing” is always nothing. But “something” is ... well, “something” and it can always change.

So ... why, at a much wiser age, do I ponder on this 1983 flashback?

Because I am absolutely astounded that William Shakespeare, in 1603, could hit the nail on the head in defining the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Department of Homeland Security.

Let me explain.

I recently asked the Corps for a copy of its emergency response plan in the event that there were to be a failure at the John Redmond Dam

in Kansas. The earthen dam is located to our north on the Neosho River and stands between our community and a lake of water.

I received a nice letter saying that I could not have it, due to its sensitive nature. It appears that I could be a terrorist or, at the very least, associate with terrorists conspiring to identify weaknesses in our country’s infrastructure. Not that Katrina, Ike or the recent deluge of mid-western rainfall events have not already done that.

In the meantime, the City of Miami’s floodplain administrator and floodplain manager asked for the same documents so they could create an evacuation plan. They have been asked to sign a non-disclosure form before the Corps will release a redacted copy.

Now, for those who need clarification as I did, “non-disclosure” means that you can look at the document, read it, discuss its merits and demerits with your inner self and think about what you might do to get a city of thousands out of harm’s way — but you can’t share the information with anybody.

“Redacted” means that the Corps will remove any verbiage it deems to be too risky to

disclose.

It should also be noted that the *News-Record* has requested copies of the John Redmond Dam water control manual and the latest copy of the dam’s inspection report. Don’t have those yet. The documents have been assembled, paid for and are ready to be shipped — but the request is being reviewed because of its sensitive nature. You can thank the Corp’s loyalty to Homeland Security for the delay.

So let’s look at the what “is” and what “is not” in this situation.

There “is” a John Redmond Dam — it may or may not be damming properly. We don’t know, because the Corps “is not” quick to release the inspection report.

There “is” an emergency response plan — it reportedly lists who would be in harm’s way in the event that the dam fails. The Corps “is not” releasing that information to the public.

There “is” a local emergency management presence at both the city and county level — but neither has been presented with the Corps’ emergency response plan nor have they been asked to participate in any related preparedness exercises. I think it is safe to say that the city “is not” and the county “is not” properly prepared.

There “is” an effort to inform the public of

matters regarding its safety — but the Corps “is not” allowing that process to unfold.

Now here, my fellow Miamians, is the icing on the cake.

Last week, Gov. Brad Henry joined the Department of Homeland Security in declaring September as “National Preparedness Month.” In a public proclamation, Henry cited Oklahoma Emergency Management Director Albert Ashwood who said “the most positive thing we can do is to empower Oklahomans with knowledge and skills so they can be prepared to help themselves and others in times of emergency.”

It is enough to make my head spin!

It is clear to me that all we can be certain of is that we don’t know what we will do in the event of a failure at the John Redmond Dam and it is through no fault of our own.

Though common sense tells us that we should have a plan, apparently the Corps thinks we will ignore what we can’t see.

I don’t know about you, but that insults me.

The Corps, trusted with the task of protecting this country’s residents, has seriously missed its mark and clearly does not know the spirit of this community — or William Shakespeare.

## My two cents

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## Local Legislators