

To: *Citizens of Chatham, Virginia; State and National News Media; and Environmental and Civil Rights Organizations Throughout the State and Nation*

From: *Ken Ferruccio, past president and spokesperson for Warren County, North Carolina Citizens Concerned About PCBs and past co-chairperson for the Joint Warren County State PCB Landfill Working Group; see: ncpcbarchives.com*

Subject: *The Mining of Uranium in Chatham, Virginia*

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It is highly probable that the transformation of Chatham, Virginia, into a radioactive way of life would have catastrophic and irreversible consequences for Virginia and for this region of the South. I believe therefore that this region of the South and beyond needs to support the citizens in Chatham opposed to the mining of uranium. I believe it is not too soon to begin integrating, coordinating, and focusing resistance through the social media, and to plan peaceful, nonviolent and creative demonstrations at the legislative building in Richmond, Virginia, and to prepare for litigation as needed.

In the following analysis I use the term “delusional democracy,” the title of a book written by Dr. Joel Hirschhorn. I have not yet read the book. Any connection between my use of the term and the content of Dr. Hirschhorn’s book is purely coincidental. Dr. Hirschhorn and I served on the Joint Warren County State PCB Working Group during the time I was co-chairperson of the committee.

My detailed analysis is necessarily long because it contains quoted material too important to exclude. The entire analysis is available on the Internet at the above address. The following is the complete analysis:

Delusional Science and Delusional Democracy Are Needed to Transform Chatham, Virginia, and This Region of North Carolina into a Radioactive Way of Life.

The transformation of Chatham, Virginia, into a radioactive way of life would have serious implications for Virginia and for this region of North Carolina and beyond and would necessitate the use of delusional science and delusional democracy; it would undermine the fundamental purpose of government --namely, to secure and defend unalienable rights and would therefore precipitate a conflict that would be significant to the South and nation.

It is clear that a rationale for selective regional sacrifice is behind the proposal to mine uranium in Chatham, Virginia, because the rationale is based on the delusion that waste management regulations and facilities can ensure the containment of the radioactive waste. Waste management facilities do not contain waste; they simply recycle the waste back into the environment over time.

Delusional Science

Because the theoretical science of waste management continues to be in a state of denial concerning its limitations, even when confronted with empirical evidence of its limitations and failures, the delusional “science” of waste management continues to facilitate the destruction of communities and regions.

Because informed citizens know that the attempt to contain these dangerous wastes continues to fail, it has become nearly impossible to convince citizens with the use of delusional waste management science to accept the facilities. The sacrifice of targeted communities and regions therefore requires that delusional science be backed by delusional democracy.

Delusional Democracy

Delusional democracy is often facilitated through waste management legislation. The executive (governor) makes the decision concerning the siting of toxic, hazardous, nuclear, and radioactive waste facilities, negates the significance of public hearings, preempts local sovereignty rights concerning the siting of the facilities, and authorizes force as needed to sacrifice a community or region but deludes the targeted community or region into believing it is living in a democracy by allowing symbolic protests against the facilities and by other cosmetic procedural means as well.

Nixon’s Secret Executive Order: A National Sacrifice Area

President Nixon must have known that the use of government to sacrifice American communities and regions was hardly consistent with the democratic aspirations of the American people when in 1972 he signed “a secret executive order declaring a 4-state region to be a national sacrifice area for the mining of uranium and nuclear energy.” The national sacrifice area included Montana, Wyoming, North and South Dakota, and areas of other states were sacrificed as well.

Revealing the Secret: “Creative Destruction”

Some seem to think that sacrificing communities and regions should be openly and commonly accepted. One writer recently stated something to the effect that prosperity requires “creative destruction.” But how can our communities and our regions prosper if they are “creatively destroyed” by delusional science, delusional democracy, the secret use of executive orders, or by any other means? A Washington politician is reported to have said that “we’ll give you jobs if you let us pollute.”

Arguments: Regulations Protect Us?

Concerning the proposal to mine uranium in Chatham, Virginia, some will argue that regulations will guarantee safety. But regulations are simply another way of masking and facilitating the rationale for selectively sacrificing the environment, natural resources, and public health of targeted communities and regions. The characteristics of sites are studied; then regulations are written to fit the desired sites to ensure their approval. Instead of the sites needing to meet site-selection criteria, site selection criteria are

written to legalize the desired sites, however inadequate the characteristics of the sites may be. Inadequacies of the sites are justified by arguing that conceptual engineering designs of the containment facilities can compensate for intrinsically inadequate characteristics of the sites, but empirical evidence of failed waste management facilities continues to contradict the containment theory; consequently, the destruction of targeted communities and regions continues.

Others say that the application of conceptual engineering designs will ensure that waste facilities will last for hundreds and thousands of years needed to keep the radioactive waste from polluting the environment, but such a position cannot be proved. Proof is based not on arbitrary beliefs about the future, but on the empirical realities of past and present -- empirical realities leading to the inescapable conclusion that the containment of waste continues to fail.

Some say the facilities will be closely monitored. Monitoring, however, did not prevent the radioactive contamination of drinking water in Texas. "The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) spent two decades under-reporting radiation levels in local water supplies, which helped water districts avoid fines, but which exposed residents to potentially harmful radioactive elements" (*Texas Environmental Commission manipulated test results to hide radiation in drinking water*).

Containment Fails: Church Rock, New Mexico, 1979

According to Erin Klauk (*Environmental Impacts on the Navajo Nation from Uranium Mining*),

The Church Rock disaster [New Mexico] is the largest accidental release of radioactive material in U.S. history. A tailing dam burst, sending eleven hundred tons of radioactive mill wastes and ninety million gallons of contaminated liquid pouring toward Arizona into the Rio Puerco River. The Navajo still cannot use this water.

Johansen states that eleven hundred tons of radioactive mill wastes poured in the Rio Puerco River and "100 million gallons of radioactive water gushed through the dam before the crack was repaired" and "the Rio Puerco showed 7,000 times the allowable standard of radioactivity for drinking water below the broken dam shortly after the breach was repaired, according to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission" (Bruce E. Johansen's *The High Cost of Uranium in Navajo Land*).

Health Impact of Uranium Mining on Navajo Residents and Miners

Johansen states

In February 1978, the Department of Energy released a Nuclear Waste Management Task Force report that said that people living near the tailings ran twice the risk of lung cancer of the general population. The *Navajo Times* carried reports of a Public Health Service study asserting that one in six uranium miners had died, or would die prematurely, of lung cancer. . . . Esther Keeswood, a member of the Coalition for Navajo Liberation from Shiprock, N.M., a reservation city near tailings piles, said in 1978 that the Coalition for Navajo Liberation had documented the deaths of

at least fifty residents (including uranium miners) from lung cancer and related diseases.

“A Nuclear Way of Life”

According to Johansen,

The enormous spill of nuclear waste into the Rio Puerco was but one incident in a distinctly nuclear way of life in Navajo land. The nuclear-mining legacy of 30 years blows through the outlying districts of Shiprock, N.M., the Navajos' largest city, on windy days. The hot, dry winds shave radioactive dust from the tops and sides of large tailings piles around the city. One of them is 70 feet high and a mile long. Until the mid 1970s, the Atomic Energy Commission assured the Navajos of Shiprock that the tailings were harmless. In early 1978, however, the Department of Energy released a Nuclear Waste Management Task Force report which said that persons living near the tailings piles have twice the expected rate of lung cancer. By 1978, the Navajos were beginning to trace the roots of a lung cancer epidemic which had perplexed many of them, since the disease was very rare among Navajos before World War II. In addition to exposure from the tailings piles, many of the miners who started America's nuclear stockpile had died of lung cancer.

Written Assurances of Safety Denied to Navajos: Follow-up Studies

According to Johansen,

When the Navajos asked the federal Environmental Protection Agency, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Relocation Commission for assurance that the land was safe, all three declined to provide the requested written assurance to the Navajos. . . . Dr. Joseph Wagoner, special assistant for occupational carcinogens at the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, a federal agency, said that of 3,500 persons who mined uranium in New Mexico, about 200 had died of cancer by the late 1970s. In an average population of 3,500 persons, 40 such deaths could be expected. The 160 extra deaths were not the measure of ignorance, he said. Published data regarding the dangers of radon was widely available to scientists in the 1950s, according to Wagoner. Health and safety precautions in the mines were not cost-effective for the companies, he said. . . . By 1990, the death toll among former miners had risen to 450, and was still rising. Relatives of the dead recalled how the miners had eaten their lunches in the mines, washing them down with radioactive water, never having been told that it was dangerous. Many of the men did not even speak English. The Navajo language contains no indigenous word for "radioactivity."

Conclusion

How many tons of radioactive mill waste and gallons of contaminated liquid would eventually pour into the Dan, the Bannister, the Roanoke Rivers, Kerr and Gaston Lakes and beyond to Albemarle Sound and the Atlantic if uranium mining in Virginia were legalized? How far would radioactive contamination of the air travel? Fifty miles, one

hundred, five hundred miles, farther? What would have been gained? What lost, forever? What would this radioactive way of life be like for Virginians and North Carolinians and their neighbors?

Delusional science and delusional democracy are threatening to destroy the American South and the nation. So what must we do about it? Thomas Jefferson believed that from time to time we need to remind the government of the spirit of resistance. I believe that this is one of those times.

We need to protect our future and future generations and to do everything in our personal and collective power to prevent uranium mining in Virginia. We need to affirm that we the people will decide our fate -- not Virginia Uranium Mining and those who stand to profit at the cost of Virginians, North Carolinians, and their neighbors.

The truth is that while we are often alienated from corporations by the way they pollute and destroy our lives, we can never be alienated from our unalienable rights, not by putting words on paper, not by waste management legislation, not by the U.S. Supreme Court, not by any other means.

These rights are not delusions; they are realities our forefathers knew were intrinsic to our existence. They are the stuff we are made of. We are born with them; we die with them, and the security of these rights is the fundamental responsibility of government.

Why should Chatham, Virginia, and this region of North Carolina permit the failed theoretical science of waste management (delusional science) backed by deception and force (delusional democracy) destroy our way of life and all that we hold dear? The answer is obvious: We should not, and we will not.

Resistance to uranium mining in Chatham must succeed, and it will. As opposition to uranium mining grows and becomes more coordinated, it will be wise for leaders of the many organizations opposing the mining of uranium to unite and to begin planning a Virginia legislative day in time for elections, to meet with legislators, learn more about their individual positions on mining, and hold press conferences and peaceful, nonviolent, creative demonstrations of public sentiment in front of the legislative building.

A strong demonstration of the public sentiment opposing uranium mining must necessarily come in the fall, preferably before the elections and before the Virginia Working Group submits its studies to Governor McDonnell, and before the legislature reconvenes in January and has the opportunity to lift the ban. Leaders of organizations and governments opposing uranium mining may need to take legal action as well and back litigation with continued demonstrations of their sentiments.