



HALIFAX COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

134 South Main Street
P. O. Box 699
Halifax, VA 24558-0699
(434) 476-3300
Fax: (434) 476-3384
www.halifaxcountyva.gov
September 11, 2012

SUPERVISORS
THOMAS E. WEST
Chairman
W. BRYANT CLAIBORNE
Vice Chairman
BARRY A. BANK
DOUGLAS V. BOWMAN
E. WAYNE CONNER
J. T. DAVIS
WILLIAM I. FITZGERALD
LOTTIE T. NUNN

JAMES M. HALASZ
County Administrator
jmh@co.halifax.va.us

The Honorable Robert F. McDonnell
Office of the Governor
Patrick Henry Building
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Governor McDonnell:

As elected officials and as residents of the area, the members of the Halifax County Board of Supervisors have carefully monitored the debate regarding the proposal to mine and process uranium in Pittsylvania County. We have listened to both sides of the argument; reviewed the independent studies conducted by the National Academy of Science and others; listened to presentations by experts and interested parties; considered the economic gains in taxes and business activity and jobs that the proposed operation will bring; and worried about the risks and potential harm to our families and our constituents and our communities. Through it all, we have attempted to distinguish fact from fiction, hyperbole from reality, and emotions from science. That future is, by definition, unknown and unknowable.

We are left with uncertainty. Given our status as the elected representatives of our communities, and the importance of the issues, our responsibilities require that we take a position, weighing the information available and using the lifetime of experience we all possess as businessmen, farmers, employees, citizens, public officials, spouses and parents. We conclude the following:

1. Under the best of circumstances, any economic gains to the community will be short term while the long-term costs and liabilities are essentially forever. The enormous quantities of radioactive waste generated will have to be isolated and monitored - at a financial cost to the taxpayers- for thousands of years.
2. Any economic gains are very likely to be offset by economic losses associated with industries or organizations that remove the area from their list of possible sites because of the real or perceived health risks associated with this proposed operation. Our economic development people have told us they are already encountering resistance in some instances.
3. There is clearly some heightened risk to public health and the environment associated with uranium mining as compared to, for instance, a department store, or an engineering firm or a medical practice, or a coal mine.

4. The uranium mining industry has a checkered environmental and public health record. The products and byproducts of the uranium mining and milling process are undeniably toxic and dangerous to humans. The question is whether these can be isolated and controlled, with 100% certainty they will never reach the communities or populations surrounding the operation. Simple assurances by parties with a vested economic interest are not sufficient.
5. If this mining site were located in the middle of the Utah desert, there would be little controversy. Unfortunately it is located in area with a far more volatile and wet climate, a very high ground water table, and far denser populations in close proximity. The concern is heightened by its location within a vital watershed that supplies drinking water to millions of people.
6. Proponents have told us to put our faith in new technology and regulations. Yet history has taught us that even the most sophisticated technology and safety and regulatory schemes can fail, sometimes with disastrous consequences. One only has to recall the nuclear disasters in Japan, Chernobyl, and Three Mile Island, or Love Canal or Bhopal or Allied Chemical. These operations were well regulated and staffed with competent, safety conscious executives and employees. All had emergency plans and backup plans - and they failed spectacularly.
7. The NAS study, the Chmura study, and indeed the Governor's own Working Group did not, and apparently do not, plan to address the one relevant question – *Can mining be done safely at Coles Hill?* Until that question has been unambiguously answered, it would be irresponsible to go forward.

We have heard about new technologies and best practices, but it has not been made clear what those are. We have heard about regulation, yet independent agencies have said Virginia has absolutely no expertise in this area, nor the personnel or financial resources to adequately take on this assignment. We have seen no specific studies of the hydrogeology of the Coles Hill site. Finally, we have been told that the ban on uranium mining must be lifted before these and other questions can be answered. That response makes no sense. Multiple consultants and independent researchers have now spent years studying this issue. All have raised very serious concerns. The Governor's Working Group has given no indication they plan to address these directly.


The Board and the citizens we represent are not anti - development. We want the best for our community. We live here. We make choices every day to advance the welfare of our citizens and our communities. We are engineers and business executives, farmers, lawyers and surgeons, bankers and accountants. We are graduates of the University of Virginia, N.C. State, Virginia Tech, Harvard and Princeton. Many of us have worked in large and complex industrial operations. Many of us have worked in government, as politicians and regulators and staff. We have seen firsthand that there are no fail safe systems – designs are flawed, people and machinery fail, regulations can be inadequate - or they can be violated - and regulators can be lax. There are simply too many unanswered questions to move forward at this time - too little clarity, too much ambiguity.

We call upon the Governor to insist that his task force take up the key public health questions raised by the previous studies and address each of them *directly and specifically*, in order that the public might be assured that the mining and processing of uranium at Coles Hill can be done with no risk to the health and environment of the communities surrounding the site. If more time is required to answer those questions, then take that time. If more resources are required, obtain them. This is far too critical a choice for anything less.

Finally, we call upon the citizens of the area and throughout the state to insist on thorough and responsive answers to the legitimate concerns that have been raised. Citizens should contact their legislators and public officials. They should support those who are leading this effort to obtain clarity, with funds and participation. Citizens are urged to contact local officials and local Chambers of Commerce to register their views. This is an important debate for all Virginians. Citizens must participate if they want to be heard.

Sincerely,

**HALIFAX COUNTY
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thomas E. West". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Thomas E. West
Chairman