

George Bowles



## Editing for Uranium

It would be difficult to imagine a better example of the awesome power of special interest lobbyists around the state Capitol, or of the boot-licking subservience with which the state government, on occasion, kowtows to them.

The chain of events began last fall when the State Council on the Environment prepared a report on the impact of prospective uranium mining operations in Virginia. The report was duly compiled by the council staff and submitted to J. B. Jackson Jr., the agency director.

The staff version of the report was a tightly printed four-page document which addressed the pros and cons of a mining venture proposed by the Marline Uranium Corporation, a New York based firm which has been purchasing uranium mining options in several areas of the state. It noted a number of environment-related dangers associated with such a venture, including those inherent in the "tailing," or residue left after the mineral is milled, and the danger to human tissue. It also cited instances in which uranium mining has created serious environmental problems elsewhere.

Needless to say, Marline was much interested in the report since its conclusions could deter-

mine whether or not the company would be licensed to begin actual digging.

Former Del. Edward E. Lane of Richmond, now a lobbyist for Marline, requested and was given a copy of the report. Apparently Lane and Marline did not like what they saw when they read it.

There is some dispute about what happened next. Either Lane or Marline officials — or both — edited the report, or, as Jackson maintains, he did the editing himself, although clearly along lines acceptable to the mining company. The importance of having the report in suitable form and saying the right thing was underscored by the fact that the purification process prior to editing was coordinated with Jennifer Joy Manson, senior executive assistant to then-Gov. John Dalton, and with others close to the governor.

In any event, when the report finally was released, to the dismay of the Environmental Council staff, it had become a two-page document which was nothing more than a bland recital of the technical aspects of the mining process and routine precautions that should be taken. Gone was the staff's well-documented and devastating list of the real hazards involved.

The top blew off the whole

sorry episode two weeks ago when the Piedmont Environmental Council, a private conservation organization based in Loudoun County, obtained copies of correspondence relating to the report by invoking the Freedom of Information Act. The PEC, in turn, blew the whistle to the Fredericksburg Free-Lance Star, which, after a proper investigation, ran the story.

Great credit is due both to the PEC and the newspaper. May their tribe increase.

The Robb administration, which is not inclined to be quite so accomodating to special interest pressures as was its predecessor, is furious about the whole affair. Heads may roll, and among them may be that of Jackson, a Dalton appointee whose reappointment by Robb has been under consideration.

After all, the Council on the Environment is supposed to be primarily concerned with protecting Virginia's environment, and not the interests of those whom that protection might inconvenience, disturb or even drive out of state.

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