

Vote NO on Senate Bill 525

Background: SB 525 (Wagner) is said to be “just a study”, but it is considerably more than that. The bill would confer the legitimacy of a state commission on what remains a private business venture. The promise of private-sector funding sets a dangerous precedent but does not account for the significant state-agency resources that would be required. Nor is there any guarantee that a study be conducted by the National Academy of Sciences, be peer-reviewed, or allow adequate public input. Most importantly, the bill would prematurely authorize the commission to draft regulations for uranium mining—in the absence of any decision by the General Assembly that issuing such regulations is in the public interest. In fact, the Senate’s budget proposal includes an amendment that **“requires the [Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy] to report by December 15, 2009 on the feasibility of regulating uranium mining in Virginia.”** *Moving to this regulatory step before the safety of mining uranium in Virginia can even be established prejudices the outcome of any commission “study.”*

Status of the Bill: The bill is in the House of Delegates and assigned to the Rules Committee.

Talking Points:

- 1. A state-sanctioned study is premature.** The proponents of the industry have put forward nothing but hollow assertions that uranium mining, milling and waste disposal technology has vastly improved in the 23 years since the General Assembly declined to open Virginia to uranium mining.
 - a. Substantive evidence should be provided by the private sector and thoroughly evaluated before a million-dollar study is authorized.
- 2. A study bill should NOT sanction regulations.** As written, the bill calls for an “independent, scientific study” but doesn’t require the commission consider its findings before developing a statutory and regulatory scheme to permit uranium mining in Virginia.
 - a. If there is a study, its conclusions should be subject to public hearings and the commission subject to re-authorization by the General Assembly before work begins on a statute that would lift the current moratorium.
- 3. An under-funded study is not in the public interest.** The bill sets up a non-reverting fund and assumes that contributions will be made to support the work of the commission but does not guarantee appropriate funding.
 - a. Virginia spent \$400,000 (about \$800,000 in today’s money) on a study in the 1980s.
 - b. The fund should have at least \$1,000,000 before a new commission starts work.
- 4. Uranium mining is a matter of statewide concern.** The bill creates a commission that would under-represent regions likely to be affected by uranium mining.
 - a. In the 1980’s tens of thousands of acres of land were leased for uranium mining in the northern and southern piedmont. Some of Virginia’s most populous communities are downstream.
 - b. The citizens of Southside Virginia deserve a strong voice, given proposed mines in that region, but the impacts of mining cannot be limited to any one geographic area.
- 5. The timeline for the study is entirely unrealistic.** A serious, independent study cannot be completed by December 15, 2009.
 - a. The timeline is all the more flawed given that the bill to assumes both a credible scientific study AND the development of a statutory and regulatory scheme for mining by that date.

