



The Green Party of Virginia

Number 23

The Green Party of Virginia Newsletter

Summer 1999

Contents

State Meeting Announcement	Staff
Is Sludge Safe?	Pat Bowman
Two Candidates for General Assembly	Staff
Local Government Responsibility	Betty Sellers
Reflecting All of Us	Dean Myerson
Northern VA News	Staff
A Right to Health Care, Not a Right to Sue	Staff

[Newsletters](#)

[GPVA](#)

State Meeting

Green Party of Virginia summer business meeting on July 31 at Ashland Public Library. Meeting begins at 10:30 and ends at 5:00. The Sierra Club will sponsor a workshop in the afternoon: "Communicating a Winning Environmental Message in Virginia."

[Newsletters](#)

[GPVA](#)

Is Sludge Safe?

by Pat Bowman

With the practice of spreading sludge on farmland come many questions about its safety. When farmers agree to have sludge spread on fields, I wonder if they have read the Cornell studies, the Univ. of Arizona and Florida studies that say this practice can be very unsafe. I realize the farmer's decision is based on the theory of getting free fertilizer; however, how free is it --- and how safe?

Sludges contain a high concentration of pathogenic viruses, bacteria, and parasites. In fact, most microbes which are present in raw sewage are concentrated in sludge, according to the Cornell Institute. We have to remember that the levels and types are dependent in part on the health of the population contributing to the sewage plant and will vary over time as the health of the population varies. We have certainly seen the rise in cancer in our area; and from all reports we must be aware that we are once again going to be susceptible to diseases that we thought were a thing of the past.

Also present in the sludge are heavy metals that local industries contribute. Our rivers, streams, and wells are already contaminated with nitrates and other dangers, causing a significant rise in "blue babies" in our part of the Shenandoah Valley.

Everyone lives in a watershed. Even if a home is not next to a stream, it is in a watershed, and common everyday practices can contribute to the overall pollution entering into that water system. Our family's health depends on a safe, reliable source of water, especially for drinking and bathing. Our wells also represent a large financial investment. Contaminants entering the groundwater system through karstland present a significant health concern because many wells tap water-filled cavities that are directly connected to the surface. In karstlands, which we live in, groundwater usually resurfaces at springs and therefore carries the contamination into streams and rivers that also may be used as water supplies. According to a pamphlet distributed by the Cave Conservancy of the Virginias, a major problem with living on karst is that there may be no safe distance from contamination at which to drill a well for drinking water.

Houff's Feed & Fertilizer was recently granted a permit by the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to spread sludge on 3,000 acres in Augusta and Rockingham Counties (see related article). We also know that there are other permits out there for land-applying sludge. Now the DEQ only passes these permits; they will tell you that they do not have the personnel or resources to monitor sludging operations. Do you feel safe knowing that this sludge can eventually work its way into your drinking water? I don't.

We know our rivers are already contaminated to the point that we should not eat fish out of them. Representatives from the Well Drillers Association tell us that in the future bringing in clean water when drilling a new well will probably be only a memory. Yet, we allow a practice to continue that will make these problems worse.

I hope everyone knows that after sludge has been spread public access to that land should be controlled for at least 12 months. No root crops can be grown for a period of 18 months. Land shouldn't be excavated for 12 months. Beef cattle should not be grazed for a minimum of 30 days and milk cattle for 60 days. No tobacco crops can be grown on the land ever.

Now, I feel that if those conditions are any indication of the seriousness regarding sludge, then just how safe are we in letting our young children out to play around these areas? Reports I have read state that a child should never go barefooted near an area where sludge has been spread. What a mind-boggling endeavor to keep our children from ever wandering into these unsafe areas. Are we more careful with our root crops, milk cows, beef cattle than our children?

I am originally from a farm family, and I want farmers to have everything available to them in order to keep our farms solvent; however, I do not want the sludge at the expense of our health, devaluation of our land, and destruction of our wells.

We need to consider the long-range consequences of this practice. We know that is has been going on for a long time, with most of the public unaware of what has been happening, but let's give some thought to future generations. We have learned that ocean dumping wasn't safe, that China has ruined its farmland by dumping sewage onto it. Let's give some thought to what we are doing to ourselves and to one of the most beautiful areas in the U.S.

Let's give to future generations what we have taken for granted. Beautiful rivers and streams, clean air, land where we can let our children run free and even barefooted. Let's start now to clean up our beautiful Valley.

Our appreciation to Pat Bowman, who lives in Grottoes.

[Newsletters](#)

[GPVA](#)

Two Candidates for General Assembly

In November two Green Party of Virginia candidates will face Republican candidates for the House of Delegates. In the 55th district, Reber Dunkel will make his first run for political office. Sherry Stanley will run in the 25th district, as she did in 1997.

Reber of Hanover Courthouse, a college teacher and community activist, says he sees his campaign as an opportunity to explore issues and propose legislation that will help Hanover and Virginia protect their natural resources and communities as they struggle with immense pressures of sprawl. A life-long environmentalist, he plans to make environmental issues a central part of his campaign. The assault by developers on Ashland --- three major projects which will devour the heart and soul of the small town community and accelerate sprawl in Hanover --- is the most pressing issue. The obsolete, leaking county landfill on 301, the H and H Burn Pit Super Fund Site at Farrington, and conserving Hanover's farms and forests are major concerns as well.

In energy-related areas, he will work for proposals that encourage conservation and the use of alternative energy sources, such as solar energy. In the area of education, Reber calls Virginia's high-risk SOL tests, a "Trojan Horse." He reminds voters, "During the last General Election, Virginia had the lowest voter turn-out in memory (24 percent of eligible voters, one third of registered voters). I hope to provide Hanover voters with a choice in '99." He can be reached at 804-537-5069.

Sherry, who lives in Verona, with unfortunate firsthand knowledge of a contaminated well, has taught high school English in Rockingham County for the past twenty years. The 25th district is defined by three rivers: the South, North, and Middle. It includes the city of Waynesboro, northern and eastern Augusta County, and southern Rockingham County. The central issue in her campaign is single-payer health care (see related article on page). She wants to see Virginians have a plan that is reasonable and affordable and doesn't have us begging for crumbs from insurance companies or working two jobs, one to pay the bills and one to get health insurance.

Sherry has joined the statewide Parents Across Virginia United to Reform SOLs formed in mid-March 1999 in response to parents' complaints about SOL tests and Standards of Accreditation (this group can be reached at 540-586-6149). As always her focus is on local decision-making. In this interest she joins the Augusta County Board of Supervisors in opposing "any and all state laws that restrict local government's right to make local land use

ABOUT US

[Current Campaigns](#)

[Platform](#)

[Press Releases](#)

[Contacts / Links](#)

[E-mail Listservs](#)

[Meeting Minutes](#)

[Electoral Archives](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[Bylaws](#)

[Consensus Process](#)

[Become a Member](#)

[Donate](#)

[News Archive](#)

COMMITTEES

[Interim](#)

[Activism](#)

[Candidate Exploration](#)

[Local Organizing](#)

[Finance](#)

[Information Technology](#)

[Platform](#)

[Structural Reform](#)

[Steering](#)

GREEN LOCALS

[Arlington](#)

[Blue Ridge](#)

[Central Virginia](#)

[Fredericksburg](#)

[Loudoun](#)

[New River Valley](#)

[Northern Virginia](#)

[Richmond](#)

[Rockbridge](#)

[Virginia Beach](#)

THE TEN KEY VALUES

[Ecological Wisdom](#)

[Social Justice](#)

[Grassroots Democracy](#)

[Nonviolence](#)

[Decentralization](#)

[Community Based](#)

[Economics](#)

[Feminism](#)

[Respect for Diversity](#)

[Personal & Global](#)

[Responsibility](#)

[Future Focus &](#)

[Sustainability](#)

decisions." Too often local boards have been overruled by the state protecting developers' rights rather than local citizens' rights. Sherry can be reached at 504-248-7721.

Both Reber and Sherry will practice the Green model of campaign finance reform by accepting contributions no larger than \$100 per individual and accepting no money from PAC's or lobbyists.

[Newsletters](#)

[GPVA](#)

Local Government Must Assume Responsibility for Protecting Public Health and Water Quality where Industrial and Municipal Waste Sludge is Land-Applied

by Betty Sellers

The most important job that our Rockingham County Board of Supervisors must fulfill is to make decisions that protect public health. The Virginia State Water Control Board's recent approval of a Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) permit to Houff's Feed and Fertilizer to significantly increase available land for application of industrial and municipal waste sludge from 750 to 3,000 acres, clearly shows the difficulty DEQ faces in protecting public health and water quality regarding the issuance of sludge permits. In actuality, it is not DEQ's job to improve laws that protect public health but to write permits that meet certain statutory guidelines already on the books. These statutory guidelines do not address potential water pollution risks associated with land-applying municipal and industrial sludge on limestone karst soil. It is up to us citizens to insure the protection of public health by bringing about changes in unsafe regulations as new science points the way. DEQ enforces existing regulations. It is not their responsibility or in their authority to change laws that jeopardize the health of the general public. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) set up guidelines for DEQ to implement and monitor the land-application of sludge in an attempt to protect the public, but EPA did not take into consideration the effects on human health of applying sludge on top of karsted soil when EPA wrote guidelines for DEQ to follow. Further, DEQ has admitted that their ability to adequately monitor is hampered by lack of adequate personnel and budget.

The Rockingham County Board of Supervisors allowed the Houff permit to be passed while supervisors from Caroline, Lunenburg, Shenandoah, Amelia, Goochland, Rappahannock, Bristol, and Brunswick counties all banned land application of sludge because of groundwater contamination problems. Scientific research has raised many serious health concerns regarding pathogens and heavy metals contained in sludge that is land-applied, most especially when the sludge is not adequately tested (e.g. for viruses and other toxic substances). The failure of the Houff permit to ensure long term pH requirements to prevent leaching into groundwater also warrents deep concern.

The critical factor demanding the prohibition of land-application of sludge in Rockingham County is our county's limestone karst terrain, which is characterized by deep fissures, sinkholes, underground caves, sinking streams and springs. This situation serves to make groundwater contamination from land application of sludge not just possible, but practically inevitable. According to the Virginia Tech Karst-Water Environment Symposium Proceedings, October 30-31, 1997, "karsted rocks will not naturally filter contaminants to any appreciable extent. Moreover, contaminants are easily and very rapidly transmitted to points of discharge, principally springs and wells. In karst, what goes into the ground soon comes out of the ground with little chemical change."

The vital importance of protecting county farmers should not be overlooked. Farming is an extremely challenging occupation, and naturally many of our farmers jump at the chance of free fertilizer. However, scientific research confirms that only 1 to 3 percent of sludge is useful in plant growth. The limited economic benefit may be far outweighed by the farmers' economic losses in the event of serious contamination of their land and water, as well as the land and water of their neighbors. Del Monte and Heinz already refuse sludge-grown food crops. Over sludging farmland with industrial and municipal sludge makes it even more difficult for Rockingham County to handle its excess poultry litter problems. Poultry litter is considered by many to be a safer, more efficient high nutrient fertilizer when compared to treated human sewage and industrial waste.

Local governments have two options. (1) employ hydrogeologists, microbiologists, toxicologists, soil scientists, etc. to determine appropriate regulations that address local issues, and then establish and implement more meaningful regulations; or, (2) ban all land-application of sludge until either State or Federal regulations are developed and implemented to protect public health and water quality in our area. Landfills provide a reasonable alternative for the short term. Appropriate regulatory safeguards could be established to allow future land application of adequately treated and tested sludge on areas that will not logically lead to water contamination and health risks.

The present manner in which we allow sludging of farmland in Rockingham County boils down to the fact that citizens are expected to ignore endangerment to human health because EPA, DEQ, and the Rockingham Board of Supervisors have decided land-application of sludge on our farmers' valuable farmland is the cheapest way to handle the tough decision as to where to get rid of sludge.

Rockingham County is growing by leaps and bounds. We will soon face even greater sludge disposal problems. The Houff permit was very quickly increased from 750 to 3,000 acres. The Harrisonburg Rockingham Regional Sewer Authority, as well as other companies in Rockingham County, also land-applies sludge on karsted soil. There is a growing appreciation of precious water. It is vital that our supervisors take immediate steps to protect it. Potentially devastating economic consequences could occur in Rockingham County if we allow groundwater contamination. There are counties that have been forced to bear the heavy financial burden of establishing rural water districts.

Local government representatives accepted the responsibility for protecting our water and land when they ran for office. They must discharge those responsibilities when issues such as these are brought to their attention. Failure to do so puts not only those representatives at risk, but everyone in the community. Please call all five of the Rockingham County Board of Supervisors, not just the one in your own district. Remember, DEQ's job is to enforce regulations. It is up to county residents to bring about changes and new regulations that are needed to protect human health in Rockingham County as we continue to grow. Our appreciation to Betty Sellers, a Rockingham County citizen.

[Newsletters](#)

[GPVA](#)

Review: "Reflecting All of Us "

by Dean Myerson

The problems of American democracy: low turnout, a lack of focus on issues, and negative campaigning are a common topic. Many people blame the impact of money for many of these ills. But in "Reflecting All of Us --- The Case for Proportional Representation," Robert Richie and Steven Hill make the case that the problem is deeper --- it's in our winner-take-all elections.

Many Americans aren't aware that there is any other way to count votes than the way it is done in the U.S. They don't know that most established democracies use a different system called proportional representation (PR). Richie and Hill present the basic case that PR leads to higher voter turnout by encouraging political competition, which results in better representation of the political, racial, and gender diversity in our society. Furthermore, PR effectively negates the problems of gerrymandering -- the engineering of legislative district boundaries to benefit the party that is drawing the boundaries. This leads to policy that better reflects the will of the people, since they are more accurately represented.

Richie and Hill demonstrate that gerrymandering has resulted in an uncompetitive democracy in the United States, leaving voters with few choices in districts designed to be safe for incumbents. Through their nonpartisan organization, the Center for Voting and Democracy, Richie and Hill have documented the large number of state legislative races (41%) with only one major party candidate, and further how 80% of Congressional elections consistently have a large margin of victory, with incumbents winning reelection over 90% of the time. With a major redistricting approaching after the 2000 Census, reforming this process will again be a major topic, which should fuel a debate about proportional representation.

The book has a unique format. After an introduction by Lani Guinier, the authors argue the general case for proportional representation, followed by a series of responses by independent commentators. While none of the essayists are in direct opposition to proportional representation, a few are skeptical of some of the arguments made by the primary authors. Others deal with the practical difficulties of getting voters to accept proportional representation.

But none of the contributions are exhaustive. The very shortness of the book -- only 90 pages -- makes it unimimidating. The prospective reader isn't confronted with a dense tome of political science. But this strength also leads to the main weakness: the briefness of the debate leaves many issues unresolved. Thoughtful readers who are skeptical will find the discussions only an introduction to the issues. A good bibliography for further reading would have been useful. There are a few reading sources cited in the footnotes.

The first essay response is by Cynthia McKinney, a Democratic Congresswoman who almost lost her seat due to gerrymandering after originally being elected to a district shaped for the purpose of electing an African American. Since the Supreme Court no longer permits race-based districting, she is a supporter of the proportional representation alternative and has introduced laws in the U.S. Congress to make it possible. Similarly, legal expert E. Joshua Rosenkranz comments on some legal aspects of proportional representation, with a focus on the Supreme Court and Justice Clarence Thomas.

Political scientists John Ferejohn and Gary Cox are partial skeptics. Both are supporters but criticize certain aspects of the case presented by Richie and Hill. In particular, Cox claims that proportional representation will not work well in the presidential system used in the United States. While many commentators confuse the parliamentary system with proportional representation, Cox attempts to show that the combination of the two leads to poor governance. His examples in recent U.S. history assume that our two parties vote strongly as a block in the Congress. In many cases that is not true. The challenges of using proportional representation in a presidential form of government have not been addressed properly by Richie and Hill, but I find Cox's arguments unconvincing.

Stanford Law Professor Pamela Karlan is also part skeptic. She is concerned with the loss of the geographic emphasis that comes with districting and the possibility that campaigning in larger districts would worsen the current problems regarding campaign contributions. While the authors argue that this has not been the case in Europe and that there are other factors which prevent this, a longer debate on this point is needed given the focus on campaign spending today.

Third party activists Daniel Cantor of the New Party, and Ross Mirkarimi of the Green Party, comment on the practical question: how do we get proportional representation, particularly when sitting politicians wouldn't benefit from it. Cantor stresses the importance of the initiative, while Mirkarimi focuses on how proportional representation is presented to voters, recommending that higher voter turnout be emphasized in selling proportional representation to the public.

Similarly, Los Angeles community activist Anthony Thigpenn discusses those who would be expected to oppose a reform that improves democracy. Thigpenn rejects nonpartisan approaches to implementing proportional representation and wants this political fight to be but one aspect of the fight for justice for the poor and oppressed people of the United States. Most proportional representation activists, whatever their personal politics, shy away from tying electoral reform to a particular ideology because electoral reform in the United States has most frequently come from nonpartisan commissions. Thus the question of whether a change that improves democracy should precede populist reform, or result from it, leaves us wondering which comes first: the chicken or the egg.

The book closes with a response from Richie and Hill to some of the comments from the essayists. Considering that they had no control over the choice of essayists, this exchange is valuable, if only a taste of serious debate.

I found the nuanced criticisms from some of the contributors to have increased my awareness of the issues regarding proportional representation. There are definitely criticisms that need further examination and response. But the purpose of this brief book is to further open the debate on the practical aspects and implications of proportional representation. I am sure that "Reflecting Us All" will succeed in doing so.

Dean Myerson, who reviewed this book, is Secretary of the Association of State Green Parties and lives in Boulder, Colorado.

Reflecting All of Us
 Authors Robert Richie, Steven Hill
 Publisher Beacon Press
 Date of Publication 1999
 Price \$10

[Newsletters](#)

[GPVA](#)

Northern VA News

The NoVA Greens Traffic Reduction Project is generating interest in the broader "green" community. The plan is to bring together citizens, government officials, and business leaders to find ways to facilitate driving less, so each driver can find a way to reduce miles spent on the road. It may be telecommuting centers, better public transportation, day care at the worksite, or some other possibility. For each person the solution is different. The enabling process should be created through massive citizen participation. The Greens have developed a questionnaire approach to generate citizen interest. Paul Gagnon will promote the Greens' project as he campaigns for Chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. The Fairfax Coalition for Smarter Growth will try a limited distribution of the questionnaire to test citizen response to the NoVA Greens project. The Greens are also making arrangements to present the plan to the Arlington Community Sustainability Round Table (people from government, business, and citizen activist groups). Other anti-sprawl groups will be contacted in the near future.

The Preference Voting Project is also in high gear. A presentation is being developed for middle and high schools. It demonstrates how much more democratic ranking the candidates on the ballot and proportional representation are than winner-take-all elections and one-seat district representation.

At this time, the NoVA Greens process for determining its endorsements for the November elections is incomplete. Being considered are Carey Campbell and Johna Gagnon for the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District Board, Paul Gagnon for Chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, and David Goode for State Senator from the 35th district. The final decision on endorsements will be made by the entire NoVA Greens membership.

[Newsletters](#)

[GPVA](#)

A Right to Health Care, Not a Right to Sue

This week President Clinton presented a new health care proposal. It includes the right to sue your HMO or insurance companies if they withhold payment. Thanks. Just what we needed. We're sick, we're exhausted from trying to get our medical bills paid, but we'll have the right to spend a year or two in court and watch attorney bills mount. Clinton and his buddies don't have the answer. Virginians have to take care of themselves --- by passing a single-payer health care bill. As of June 1999, thirteen states had efforts at one level or another to adopt single-payer health care plans. Virginia can and should become the fourteenth. For instance, in Oregon a single-payer bill is the subject of a ballot initiative campaign set for November 2000. In New York a bill titled "New York Health" is cosponsored by nearly half the Assembly's members. It would provide a publicly-financed, comprehensive health care plan to every resident of New York, including people on Medicare. In March it was approved by the NY Assembly Health Committee. Massachusetts has its Health Care Trust (sponsored by 16 out of 40 in their Senate and 50 out of 160 in their House) in committee also, with an extension granted to allow development of an implementation plan

We are not talking about national health care, but universal health care on the state level. We all know why we need this. We each have our own horror stories about companies protecting their profits by making sure their costs are lower than the premiums we pay. We all know people with too little insurance or no insurance. We are not talking about a welfare program. The funds for insuring all Virginians would come from current state and federal expenditures for medical care and from the money that employers now pay private insurers to cover their employees. All the money would be in one place, instead of in the hands of companies competing for a profit. The plan would work because it eliminates multiple billing procedures, costs of advertising, lobbying, exorbitant executive salaries, and other overhead and administration costs. This will be our bill and we can have input into how our single-payer plan looks.

Sherry Stanley, Green Party candidate for the House of Delegates, promises to carry a single-payer bill to the House in 2000.

Advantages:

- Everyone is covered with the same high quality plan. The uninsured and underinsured will have the same benefits as the currently overinsured.
- All needed health care services are covered, including preventive and long-term care, mental health, and prescription drugs. Health care providers --- not insurance companies --- will decide which services are necessary for patients.
- It lets us --- not the government, our employers, or insurance companies --- choose our own providers.
- Single-payer controls outrageous health care costs. It bans wasteful insurance policies and limits hospital, doctor, and drug prices.
- It eliminates copayments and deductibles.
- It is accountable to the public --- not to the profits of insurance and drug companies. If the system is not doing what we need, we can change it because we control the plan through elected health boards.
- It makes health a right, not a privilege.

Disadvantages:

- The fierce opposition through their political influence and financial clout of insurance companies (single-payer means they would almost close shop in VA),
- Drug companies (which would be regulated by an elected health board), and other groups and corporations which would face reduced profits.

Dear President Clinton, no thanks. We'll take care of ourselves in Virginia.

[Newsletters](#)

[GPVA](#)

Thanks to:
[The Green Internet Society](#)
 for hosting this site!

Send your comments & suggestions to the [Webweaver](#).

The Green Party of Virginia
Latest Update: July 3, 2010