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Rep. George unveils HB 508, the ‘no excuses’ landfill bill

HARRISBURG, April, 2007 – The majority chairman of the House Environmental Resources and Energy Committee has introduced legislation that would strengthen citizens’ control over a landfill industry that has made Pennsylvania the nation’s dumping ground.

“Pennsylvanians cannot afford to accept anymore lame landfill excuses,” said state Rep. Camille “Bud” George, D-74 of Clearfield County. “The only reason Pennsylvania is America’s dumping ground is because of the state’s open-door policies to landfills and their developers.”

Rep. George said his House Bill 508 would provide reasonable controls over an industry that has run roughshod over citizens and communities. HB 508 would:

- Halt permitting for three years of all new landfills and incinerators, and their expansions, unless a need for additional capacity is proven.
- Rescind average or maximum daily trash volumes that already have given Pennsylvania enough landfill capacity for roughly the next 15 years.
- Provide local control, enabling communities to deny permits unless the need for disposal capacity is proven.

“Pennsylvania has been the nation’s leading trash importer for more than a decade,” Rep. George said. “Pennsylvanians are being swamped by 610 pounds of out-of-state waste every second of every day, and the stench is only exceeded by the excuses lawmakers come up with to escape responsibility for doing something about it.”

Rep. George detailed the lamest landfill excuses used by state lawmakers:

“It’s the federal government’s fault.” – The federal Interstate Commerce Clause stipulates that trash is a commodity, and states cannot charge higher fees on out-of-state garbage. However, all 50 states must operate under the same federal laws. Pennsylvania, because of its lax state laws, has been the Number One importer of trash since at least 1998, sometimes dwarfing the amounts imported by the second- and third-biggest garbage importers.

The “Don’t Hold Me Accountable” Excuse – When a state senator from central Pennsylvania was asked if he would support a freeze on landfill applications, he said the legislation “won’t go

anywhere.” Of course it won’t if the state Senate is allowed to avoid confronting the issue. The House has approved moratorium legislation in previous sessions only to have it die in the Senate.

The “Garbage On Every Corner” Response – A Senate leader said Pennsylvania would have “garbage on every corner” if a three-year freeze on landfill permits was approved. Pennsylvania currently has landfill capacity to last 15 years, and HB 508 enables any freeze on permits and capacity restrictions to be suspended should the need for additional capacity be proven.

“House Bill 508 would give municipalities the voice they need and deserve to control solid-waste disposal in their communities,” Rep. George said. “The system is now weighted in favor of the landfill industry, which has made Pennsylvania its favorite trash target.”

Rep. George noted that the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors supports a permit moratorium. “... PSATS supports a moratorium on permits for new landfills, as well as permits to expand landfills until such facilities are needed to handle the state’s waste disposal needs,” the association says in its 2007-08 Policy Statement.

Rep. George’s House Bill 508 also would:

- Make proposed host-community agreements available to the public at least 60 days before adoption.
- Prohibit landfills within 2,500 feet of a state park.
- Make landfills presumed liable for pollution or reduction of water supplies.
- Provide \$5 million a year in grants to communities significantly increasing their recycling efforts.

The legislation, with bipartisan support, has been referred to the House Environmental Resources and Energy Committee, where Rep. George is majority chairman.