

# Danville Register & Bee

Serving the Dan River Region

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DANVILLE VIRGINIA

## Setting the record straight on the study

By WALTER COLES

There are multiple errors of fact and nuance in your editorial, "Don't Make a Premature Decision" (December 26, 2010), defending the Danville Regional Foundation (DRF) and its socio-economic study on uranium mining. My purpose here is to offset the confusion created by your editorial as well as the disturbing silence of the DRF on a matter of such critical importance to the community as well as our company.

Thus, I would like to take a step back and review where we are at Virginia Uranium and where we are headed.

The Coles Hill uranium deposit is one of the richest and most accessible in the world. With nuclear power now widely in demand globally and increasingly in the U.S. as a sustainable energy source, the Coles Hill deposit presents an enormous opportunity to create jobs and economic growth in Southside Virginia while helping America become more energy independent.

The Virginia Coal and Energy Commission is the sole official entity comprehensively and impartially examining the uranium mining issue. This commission has turned to the unimpeachable National Academy of Sciences to study the health and safety of uranium mining in Virginia. Virginia Uranium, Inc., owner of the Coles Hill deposit, has supported this NAS study and has contributed the funds to pay for it. In addition, rather than merely assuming

the presence of huge economic benefits, the Coal and Energy Commission has arranged for a parallel socio-economic study of the consequences, pro and con, of uranium mining in Pittsylvania County.

Assisted by these authoritative independent studies and, depending upon their findings, the General Assembly may consider in 2012 whether to remove the current statutory moratorium and allow an appropriate regulatory program for the mining of uranium to be established in Virginia. Once a state regulatory program is established, both federal and state regulators would administer parts of the process.

Both federal and state permits would be required. And uranium mining and milling could occur only after these extensive regulatory processes conclude and only if permits are issued as a result of those proceedings. It will be a painstaking process with opportunities for careful analysis and public comment at every juncture.

This is the thorough, science- and fact-based method by which important economic and environmental issues are addressed every day in America consistent with primary concern for the health and safety of all citizens.

There are obviously some who have prejudged all this and simply want to frustrate and delay the process. They substitute speculation for science, obscure facts with fear, and try to confound and delay at every turn.

The newspaper's reference to



"paralysis by analysis" is apt, because that is indeed the tactic.

Under this familiar approach, the object of the serial studies is not the pursuit of truth but the passage of time.

What the General Assembly would consider, perhaps in 2012, is whether the commonwealth should proceed to put in place an appropriate regulatory process governing uranium mining and milling in Virginia.

Such an action would be only the start of the lengthy process of determining whether to allow uranium mining and milling at Coles Hill.

But unless impartial studies suggest there is no safe and healthy way to mine uranium in Virginia, the General Assembly would be unwise to further delay putting in place the extensive regulatory safeguards and processes that, in tandem with federal protections, will guard the health and safety of Virginians.

Those safeguards will enable the commonwealth to properly determine and develop the benefits of the Coles Hill uranium deposit for job creation, economic growth, energy independence and national security.

*Coles is chairman of Virginia Uranium Inc.*