

Spirit ADVOCATE

A5 Wednesday, September 19, 2018

WRITE TO US Send letters to editor@spiritofjefferson.com. We ask that you keep each one to 400 words or less. Include a phone number (just needed for verification) and your town of residence

BJORN R. ANDERSEN

'Tales of destruction' aren't the Rockwool truth

Editor's note: Bjorn R. Andersen is the senior vice president of group operations and technology for the Rockwool Group. On Sept. 5, he delivered remarks to the Charles Town City Council about Rockwool's manufacturing project at the former Jefferson Orchards. A condensed version follows –

As you know, Jefferson County competed with 50 different counties in 10 different states to have us locate here. And with good reason – we are ready to invest more than \$150 million in this community and create at least 150 local well-paid jobs. We are happy to be in Jefferson County and want to be a valued contributor to the local community.

We continue to be grateful to local and state officials who participated in the bidding process that led us to choose Jefferson County.

I have worked more than 20 years in the Rockwool Group, including working in and living near our company's plants in Poland, Malaysia, the United Kingdom and Scandinavia.

We have been criticized for not engaging with the whole community in Jefferson County. We have taken the criticism to heart and we are striving to talk with you on your terms.

We held four sessions at our open house and we are pleased with the number of people who visited and spoke with our colleagues. We have participated in several council and board meetings and continue to be at your disposal for any clarification.

At the same time, we are disappointed that the Concerned Citizens group publicly encouraged peo-



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ple to boycott the event. We would have liked to have talked with all of them. We think that the facts presented would have addressed their concerns about what kind of neighbor we will be.

I would like to address some dire claims made by some opponents to the project. Please know that we have had no problems responding to people's concerns and answering very detailed questions from our future neighbors. We think it's part of our job.

However, it's also part of our job to respectfully push back against statements and claims that are patently and blatantly false.

We hear that the facility will cause human illness, environmental catastrophe and the destruction of property values. In 80 years and with 45 manufacturing facilities around the world we have never had such a problem. Property values in Milton, Ontario, have gone up 400 percent in the 30 years we have operated there.

We have seen posters with children in gas masks. I have been around Rockwool plants for 20+ years and have never seen anything like this.

I have lived and raised my children near these factories. I'm fine, and so are they. So were the plants' tens of thousands of neighbors.

We hear claims that we will destroy farmland, kill wildlife, sicken livestock. In Wales, we have a woodland learning center on our grounds, where schoolchildren come to learn about the flora and fauna, where they can hear about the resident wildlife such as bats, birds, lizards, rabbits, badgers and deer. No one has died [or] gone home sick and they don't wear gas masks. Close to the factory, there is a riding school [and] herds of sheep and cattle graze there.

We also hear we will negatively impact tourism in Jefferson County. In Croatia, where we had challenges with protests in 2008 and 2009, the tourism industry thrives and grows year on year. Tourists from all over Europe go to the Istria region, the very location of our factory, to experience its great food, nature and beaches – just a few miles from our facility.

Less than five miles from our facility in Cigacice, Poland, which is one of the largest stone wool plants

in the world, a luxury vineyard has recently been established, bringing winemaking to the region.

Jay Mansfield posted on social media about how we would be a significant health risk due to methanol and that people will die due to this. Let me ask, if this were a legitimate analysis and a realistic scenario, do you not think it would have played out at some point previously in Rockwool's 80-year history? The fact is, it has not.

Some people have said we can't operate in Europe or our home country of Denmark because we can't meet the environmental standards there. This is simply not true. We have plants in the United Kingdom, Norway, Denmark, Germany, Poland, France, Holland, Spain, Switzerland, Croatia, Hungary and the Czech Republic. We also have factories in Russia, Malaysia, Thailand, China, and, as you also know, in Canada and the United States.

All real world experiences show a very different reality than the tales of destruction that we hear await the people of Jefferson County once our

plant is in operation.

Whether they already have well-paid jobs here or elsewhere, we accept that some people don't want this type of facility in their community because they want it to develop differently. That's between them and their elected leadership and it's not our place to comment on Jefferson County's economic policy.

We have been around for 80 years. We are the largest maker of environmentally friendly stonewool insulation in the world. We are successful because we are a responsible company dedicated to bringing the most sustainable insulation and other stonewool products to global markets. This includes operating our plants with the minimum impact on the local environment. And we continue to reduce this impact even further.

We welcome anyone to talk with us, get the facts on the table. We are ready to form a stakeholder group with a well-represented and diverse participation. It seems to us that this is the most reasonable way forward.

JULIE ARCHER

West Virginia needs real judicial reform

A recent poll found that just 4 percent of West Virginians have "a great deal of trust" in the state Supreme Court. After all that has been said and done by these five justices – misspending, misleading statements, and even potential criminal activity by two – it hardly comes as a surprise to anyone in West Virginia. But the current approach to just replace the justices in order to rebuild trust in our court might make the situation even worse.

To punish these misdeeds, the House of Delegates voted to impeach the four remaining Supreme Court justices, after one retired. And after another justice resigned, Gov. Jim Justice appointed two prominent Republican politicians to fill the vacancies. Unfortunately, while opportunistic legislators appear to be taking advantage of the situation for political gain, their cynical approach will only lower our confidence in the fairness, independence and impartiality of our courts even further.

The current and former justices will now be tried by the Senate, which will decide their guilt or punishment, most likely removal from office. However, that won't address the systemic problems that have eroded trust and confidence in the courts.

The problem is that even after reforms following previous scandals, outside, unaccountable spending in our judicial elections has continued to skyrocket and who is trying to support or oppose our supreme court candidates remains dismally opaque to the voters of West Virginia. After all, when a child fails a test, you look at what affected that individual child, but if a whole grade of children is failing, you better look at how the teachers are getting hired.

Our state is not alone in these problems. Many other states who elect their judges also lack adequate transparency around their elections. For most, big-money judicial elections are a new phenomenon, where wealthy special interests play a big role in supporting or opposing certain candidates. And most experts

expect this trend to only get worse. Outside money doesn't play by any rules, and it funds the worst negative ads that are often misleading. Worse still, they often hide behind friendly names like "West Virginians for the Greater Good" and voters don't get to know who or what special interests they represent.

Imagine a big-money special interest hiding behind one of these secret, unaccountable big-money groups spends millions to get a judge elected. When they have a case before that court, the voters of West Virginia won't have any way of knowing, but you can bet they've made it clear to the judge. It's a spending scandal of another kind – behind the veil of secrecy.

Although West Virginia passed some good reforms after previous scandals, recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions like Citizens United have given special interests more ways to influence elections, but no disclosure is required. Our democracy deserves the best and West Virginia voters deserve to choose their judges free from secret special interest influence.

Our coalition, West Virginia Citizens for Clean Elections, is fighting for real reform. If we really want to increase West Virginians' trust in our judiciary, it's time to update the laws and bring strict and prompt disclosure and transparency to the outside money spent in judicial elections. Yes, the judges should be punished for what they did wrong, but we miss an opportunity for real change, and a fairer, more impartial court if we don't look at the way our judges get elected.

– Julie Archer is project manager at the West Virginia Citizen Action Group in Charleston and the co-coordinator of West Virginia Citizens for Clean Elections, a statewide coalition working to increase transparency and accountability



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sebastian Gorka a fitting speaker for county

I am not a fan of the Democratic or Republican parties, and am a registered Independent. Seeing and reading last week's column in the *Spirit* about Sebastian Gorka led me to do a little research.

That's not to diminish in any way the record of Missouri's attorney general Jason Kander, who spoke to county Democrats.

Wikipedia has an evenhanded and detailed article on Dr. Gorka, who has lived through the turbulent times following World War II in Europe. He has spent a good part of his life actively participat-

ing in the recovery of his parents' home country of Hungary.

Having seen and listened to Dr. Gorka's comments on recent events, I have been impressed with his sensible and logical observations. His awards were based on his opposition to the German and Russian occupation of Hungary.

I would say that Dr. Gorka is indeed a fitting speaker for Jefferson County.

MIKE NEMAC
Charles Town

It's 'Hunger Action Month'

September is Hunger Action Month across the United States. In West Virginia, hunger is a serious issue for 267,000, or one in six West Virginians every day.

Hunger isn't always something that can be identified at a glance. Sometimes it's the single parent skipping a meal so that their child can eat, a senior stretching lunch into dinner, or even a child sneaking home snacks for their siblings. Hunger takes a toll, whether we notice it or not.

Fortunately, hunger is one public issue that is solvable in the U.S. Right now, Congress is entrenched in debate over the Farm Bill and the House version (H.R.2) and Senate version (S. 3042).

For West Virginia, the Senate bill goes much farther in protecting our most vulnerable populations, including seniors, veterans and chil-

dren. The Senate maintains a strong Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, while maintaining funding for commodity programs for families and seniors.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program feeds thousands of families each year through our network of feeding programs, while the Commodity Supplemental Food Program provides monthly assistance to 5,000 seniors in West Virginia along.

SNAP is critical to solving hunger in the United States, both by providing access to nutrition for adults and children, and as an economic driver for the country. SNAP provides seven times the meals as the charitable sector, a gap that quite simply could not be made up. The only way to do that is through a Farm Bill with robust nutritional programs for SNAP,

TEFAP and CSFP.

Many of us know, that hunger is not seasonal. I hope that Hunger Action Month sparks something greater, a stronger or renewed interest, into doing something about hunger all year long.

I hope that everyone takes a few moments to let their representatives know that hunger is a concern by calling, emailing or stopping in. Hunger is solvable if we work together.

Anyone that is interested in joining our mission can visit our website to learn more or call us at 304-364-5518.

J. CHAD MORRISON
Gassaway

– J. Chad Morrison is the executive director of the Mountaineer Food Bank

WORTH NOTING



"Term limits for the [U.S. Supreme Court] are an excellent idea. It would take a constitutional amendment, but that's OK. The United States has already amended its Constitution 27 times – or an average of about once every nine years. We are overdue for at least one more amendment. ... The most appealing idea to me is staggered 18-year terms on the court, with each four-year presidential term automatically

bringing two appointments. Such a system would be more consistent with democratic principles. It would have several ancillary benefits, too. Aging justices would no longer hang on to their jobs past the point when they should (which has been a real problem in the past). And as Ornstein notes, highly qualified candidates in their late 50s and early 60s – who are now largely ignored by presidents – would be considered for the court."

– DAVID LEONHARDT,
New York Times opinion columnist