

Spirit ADVOCATE

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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

CHRISTINE SNYDER

Some initial anti-Rockwool contentions are false. What does that mean for all the rest?

I'm anti-pollution and also opposed to wild conspiracy theories. It worries me to see so many in the "Toxic Rockwool" movement in Jefferson County repeatedly share contentions and conspiracies that I know to be incorrect.

Let's start with what's described as the Denmark-based company's "stealth" arrival in Jefferson County 11 months ago.

People who oppose the construction of Rockwool point to when the *Spirit of Jefferson* ran the legal ad detailing the emissions the state Department of Environmental Protection will regulate once the factory opens in mid-2020.

I continue to see members of Jefferson County Vision – the nonprofit formed after citizens began fighting the Ranson project in early July, just after the formal groundbreaking in late June – point to the timing of that legal ad.

The contention came up in environmental reporter Kate Mishkin's story about Rockwool that ran in the *Charleston Gazette-Mail* on Oct. 6.

"Most residents say they never really knew about the plant," she writes. "Had they seen the legal advertisement from Rockwool that ran in the *Spirit of Jefferson*, a weekly newspaper with a 5,000 circulation, the day before Thanksgiving, maybe they could've spoken up in time, they said."

Yes, that legal ad from the company did run in the *Spirit* the week of the holiday, but that timing wasn't Rockwool's choice. Depending on exactly which day the paperwork arrived to the *Spirit's* office manager Cara Young, Rockwool's legal ad easily could have appeared a week earlier, or a week later.

Beyond the false idea that Rockwool wanted the legal ad to appear in an edition when citizens would be distracted by Thanksgiving celebrations, there's the fact that the very same week that the legal ad ran, the *Spirit* also carried a front page story about Rockwool and its plans for Ranson.

That it ran the week of Thanksgiving was Young's decision, not Rockwool's.

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So much for Rockwool trying to keep its arrival here a secret.

And while people might indeed be busy around Thanksgiving, we at the *Spirit* don't put together that week's paper thinking no one will read it. We put news in our Thanksgiving week edition with the idea that people will read it.

One could argue that more people will read that week's paper because it's the start of holiday shopping season – our Nov. 22 edition included a Walmart flyer touting its Black Friday deals.

Tim Cook, now a writer for the *Spirit*, was on staff at *The Journal* of Martinsburg in late 2017 and he

also wrote a story about Rockwool's arrival that ran prominently in that daily paper that same week.

Another "Toxic Rockwool" conspiracy contends elected officials in the county banded together in a massive wrongdoing.

In an opinion column that ran in the *Gazette-Mail* a day after Mishkin's article, Rockwool opponent David Levine wrote that the siting of the Rockwool plant across from North Jefferson Elementary "required a rapid, coordinated assault executed at every level of government that exploited and weaponized a planning and zoning system designed specifically to prevent such a development."

That's quite an allegation, certainly hyperbolic. It doesn't ring true to me in part because I've seen Levine careen from one dubious project to the next over the decades – many of them enterprises buoyed with millions in crowdfunding and angel investors that nonetheless have gone under.

You may have heard of some of the names – ButterflyNet (a gaming

tech company that later moved to Silicon Valley), Husky Labs (which designed early websites for Coca-Cola, CBS, NPR and other big names), Ultraprise (a home loans trading platform he started from Husky Labs in the late 1990s), Geostellar (which aimed to allow people in the U.S. to calculate how well solar power would work for their household). He once touted a plan to attract investors to a marriage of HDTV and yoga, and now he's into crypto currency.

A Yale philosophy grad, he describes himself in his LinkedIn profile this way: "The Bard of the Age. Post-punk, Post-carbon. Sillicon [sic] Hillbilly. Founder/CEO Indeco, the Crypto Asset for a Better Human Experience."

Rather than accept Levine's suspect contention that Rockwool got here through a "weaponized," coordinated effort at "every level of government," it might be that at least some of the Rockwool "yes" votes came from elected officials who haven't gone out of their way to involve the public.

And to be fair to our elected officials, the public hasn't been all that plugged in either – not in the day-to-day issues that come before county government bodies and not in selecting good politicians.

Consider the person who's now the Jefferson County Commission president: Josh Compton, who moved from Maryland and quickly decided to try his hand at politics.

A rabid fan of small government, he won a six-year term on the Jefferson County Commission in 2016 – beating out Dale Manuel, a former state lawmaker, teacher and union member who'd spent decades in public service.

Manuel was known for suggesting public hearings on practically every topic that came before the JCC. Maybe if he'd still been on the five-member commission, a public hearing or a series of hearings would have been held and citizens now in an uproar could have become informed about Rockwool.

In that scenario, county residents could have begun raising their concerns about Rockwool far earlier in the process – without this idea that Rockwool was a big secret until the groundbreaking.

Although it should be noted that when the JCC did hold public hearings on its plan to begin charging an ambulance fee after debating the idea literally for years, people didn't turn out to comment – though plenty of anger ensued once the JCC put the ambulance fee in place.

I'm not saying the crowds vehemently fighting Rockwool are wrong to want to ensure that Jefferson County will remain a beautiful, healthy place to live. Who here doesn't want that?

But I have grown more and more skeptical about this push to run Rockwool out of Jefferson County. With some of Rockwool opponents' most repeated statements about the projects start built on clearly faulty assumptions, I find myself questioning more and more.

– Christine Snyder, the *Spirit's* managing editor, is a mother of four who lives in Ranson



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Patsy Noland should know that Rockwool opponents are brave

Something happened during a recent Q&A with the Jefferson County Commission members that has struck a chord with me, and as I have contemplated it, I feel the need to share my perspective.

During my speech, I stated repeatedly that the citizens of this community are worried about the health and safety of our community, especially our children. This is a community movement of parents from all walks of life, all socio-economic statuses, all religious beliefs, all political affiliations. At the core, we are parents who are scared for the health and safety of our own kids, and the kids of our neighbors.

Once I completed my statement, the JCC asked us questions. The first question was from Patsy Noland. I had raised so many concerns during my speech of transparency in the Jefferson County Development Authority, and

the desire for the JCC to make the brave, courageous, right choice to rescind the PILOT agreement.

You know what her question was? She wanted to know how many of us are being paid by the nonprofit.

This is so offensive on so many levels. Right after we asked that the JCDA be required now and in the future to declare any potential financial conflicts of interests, and any conflicts if they develop, she wants to know who is paying us to exercise our First Amendment rights.

I laughed and said, "None." No one in our organization is paid to do the hard work of speaking up courageously to challenge what we believe are the wrong decisions made by our government. The only people who are paid are the attorneys at Arnold & Bailey. We have hundreds of people who support Jefferson County Vision as volunteers from events

committees, PR teams, community organizers, canvassers and the legal team. We also have six brave individuals who signed up to be board members of the organization. They have put their names on the line because this is a cause they believe in so strongly, that sitting on the sidelines isn't an option.

You do not put heavy industry in next to schools. Period.

You do not operate in the shadows to give large foreign or domestic businesses tax breaks to pollute us. Period.

You do not insult your constituents by assuming that the only explanation for why we fight, is because we must be getting paid.

Our board members are courageous. Courageous because they have publicly exposed themselves, and are putting so much of their lives on hold, to save our kids. To save our community. Courage doesn't mean you are

free of fear. It means that despite fear, you're willing to fight anyways. You're willing to defend those who by themselves may not be able to.

My message to the JCC: Quit cowering behind threats of lawsuits from Rockwool, and pretending you have no options. Quit pretending like you had no part in this and that all of the fault is on Ranson when you knowingly signed the PILOT, even though several commissioners hadn't even read it prior to the meeting. Do something novel in government and be brave!

If you can't be courageous enough to ask the righteous questions and rescind unfair tax breaks, then you need to step down and let those in this community willing to fight for our kids take your place.

LINDSEY FREDMAN Charles Town

Fighting Rockwool in New York City

I recently joined six other ladies to drive to New York City to engage in a peaceful demonstration at Climate Week NYC. As members of the newly formed Concerned Citizens Against Rockwool Ranson, we thought it would be appropriate to protest the building of a new Rockwool plant here in Jefferson County.

Against our belief in what is considered "green" or environmentally friendly, Rockwool was a platinum sponsor at Climate Week NYC. Myself, the six ladies I drove up with, nine others that drove up separately were on the streets of NYC to protest that Rockwool is anywhere close to being a "green" company.

How can Rockwool consider themselves a "green" company when their insulation factory will spew at least 150,000 tons of pollutants annually. Google "green business" and you will find "green businesses are socially and envi-

ronmentally responsible. Green companies adopt principles and practices that protect people and the planet" and other similar definitions.

So we went to NYC to inform others that were attending Climate Week what Rockwool is proposing for Jefferson County.

Rockwool plans to burn coal and fracked gas, operate 24/7/365, emit tons of pollutants; create constant, heavy truck traffic and nighttime light pollution. All directly across the street of an elementary school and two miles from three other schools. And all of this on top of fragile topography.

Almost all attendees at Climate Week greeted us openly and were interested in engaging with us in dialogue. The most disappointing part was when those of my group who had advance registration were not allowed into a Rockwool event. One of our members had just received her pass, mine was being

handed to me when the four of us were asked to move into an office area where we were told we would not be allowed into this event because the room was already filled.

I found this interesting since there were approximately 100 passes still on the table (and being issued) when we were receiving ours. I did not see anyone else picking up passes being turned away.

Make of that what you will. Myself, my new 14 friends and over 11,500 CCAR members have no problem saying, "Rockwool, you have no place here in Jefferson County. You may recycle water and your end product may help in reducing the cost of heating and cooling buildings, but until you can produce your product in a 'green' manner you have no place here in Jefferson County. Please leave."

MARY ELLEN ROSS
Charles Town

Voters should heed candidates' stance on Rockwool factory

Fellow Jefferson Countians, I beg you not to vote for any local politician who refuses to speak up and help us rid ourselves of the Rockwool stink bomb which has been dropped in our midst. If allowed to continue, this project, which was conceived in secrecy by treacherous politicians, will change our lives forever. Our children will be poisoned and have their intellectual growth stunted. Their parents and grandparents will have their health impacted by early onset of heart problems and cancer. I know of what I speak because I come from the Kanawha Valley and have family suffering with cancer, asthma and early onset heart problems.

Fortunately, we in the Eastern Panhandle do have a choice. In District 67 we have John Doyle running for House of Delegates. I've known John for some time. I first met him during his earlier service in the Legisla-

ture and I have personally experienced how he works on behalf of his Eastern Panhandle constituents. While I was living in Charleston I approached him to seek his help in stopping mountaintop removal. Before I could begin to explain the evils of this destructive mining form, he lobbied me about the needs of the Eastern Panhandle, specifically the need for locality pay for teachers and state employees.

John Doyle has been with Jefferson County Vision folks at every hearing along the way. He has spoken out in support of our efforts to stop Rockwool.

We need to send him back to Charleston to seek justice for those of us who live so far away that we're often forgotten. No more! John has a loud voice with which to bring justice and fair treatment for our part of the state.

REGINA HENDRIX Charles Town