

PATSY NOLAND

Is Rockwool really what's damaging our community?

As the debate on Rockwool continues, many of our residents have requested that the Jefferson County Commission remove board members and disband the Jefferson County Development Authority for bringing Rockwool to Jefferson County. The following comments reflect my opinion in my official capacity on the JCC.

I want the public to know that I support and have complete confidence in the work of the Jefferson County Development Authority and the members of that board who work tirelessly to bring economic development to Jefferson County. They did nothing wrong in bringing Rockwool here.

The vicious attacks and accusations toward JCDA board members by the opposition to Rockwool have

become very personal, and are unwarranted and unfair. These people serve as volunteers on the JCDA and have contributed to the reasons that people want to live in and/or visit Jefferson County. I have no intentions of asking anyone to resign, nor will I support disbanding the JCDA.

I believe that the JCDA members did their due diligence in considering whether Rockwool would be a good fit for Jefferson County. Local representatives visited the plant in Byhalia, Miss., and talked with people who live there, and the feedback they received was positive.

After the negative comments began to surface from the opposition to Rockwool, I became concerned that the JCC had made a terrible mistake in signing the PILOT agreement, so

I made several random phone calls to various offices in Marshall County, Miss., to learn for myself what residents thought of Rockwool.

I spoke with several people there. Frankly, after all the anti-Rockwool sentiments began to surface, I hoped that I would learn something that would convince me that we had been lied to and manipulated into signing the PILOT agreement. That did not happen. In fact, the opposite was true. Everyone I spoke with praised Rockwool for being good neighbors and community members. I also learned that Marshall County is an active and thriving community and businesses and people continue to locate there. This information is available at the Marshall County website, marshall-county.com. The same is true

in Milton, Ontario, another community with a Rockwool facility.

I have continued to educate myself by researching everything I can about Rockwool. While I found some articles about emissions problems from 10 years ago and earlier, I learned that whatever issues they had had been corrected. Rockwool is using the best practices available to minimize any negative effect on the environment and the company continues to work toward improving its processes.

Voting to rescind the PILOT agreement is not an option for me. As a county commissioner, I have a fiduciary duty to our citizens to protect the county from lawsuits. I would never intentionally put the county or our citizens in such a situation. There are much better

ways to spend your tax dollars than spending it on lawyers defending a law suit. I cannot imagine anyone or group that truly loves this county wants that either.

I love this place that has always been my home. While I respect everyone's right to protest, in my opinion the damage that is being done by the very vocal opposition is far greater than any damage that Rockwool could ever create.

— Patsy Noland, a Democrat, is serving her second term on the Jefferson County Commission



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

What's the opposite of 'woke'?

I am woke. It's an interesting term with an interesting history, with "I am woke" first becoming widely used in the Black Lives Matter movement.

Now "I am woke" is used whenever people want to declare they're alert and paying attention to injustices. It has become a phrase connected with taking action.

In Jefferson County, we've seen many citizens become activists and calling on others to stay woke. Here's the thing: One must be awake to pay attention. Being "woke" and being

awake do work together.

Peter Onoszko, a Republican appointed as a Jefferson County Commissioner who now is running for election in November, apparently can't keep his eyes open long enough to pay attention to the voices of our community. Mr. Onoszko isn't woke, nor is he awake.

I believe the citizens of Jefferson County deserve better representation. I believe Mr. Onoszko should have as many naps as he would like to enjoy — as a private citizen at his home.

It is a slap in the face to the citizens who attend county and city meetings to watch as the officials nod off, then wake up and cast a vote.

Mr. Onoszko was never elected, and we shouldn't now reward him with a commission position — work that is so very important to the daily lives of each of us in this county. Last I checked, most employees caught sleeping on the job lose their position.

RODNEY PIPES
Charles Town



Flanked by fellow Jefferson County Development Authority members Karan Townsend and Daryl Hennessy, Jefferson County Commissioner Peter Onoszko snoozes during an Aug. 28 meeting. There's also video of Onoszko, a Republican on the Nov. 6 ballot, asleep at the meeting.

Striving to get correct picture about Rockwool

Administrators from Concerned Citizens Against Rockwool just brought to my attention that some points about health concerns included in my Sept. 5 column printed in the Spirit of Jefferson were incorrect.

In my opinion piece I quoted an article about a former Rockwool Industries factory in Cameron, Mo., but I now know that plant is not the same company as Rockwool North America or Roxul USA — and in fact does not have any connection to the busi-

ness working to build a factory in Ranson. It would appear that "Rockwool" is both a proper noun and a generic reference to similar products made by different companies, sort of like "Kleenex."

I know now that Erin Brokowitz's investigation found that cancers that had developed in that region were due to Chromium 6 pollutants in a sludge that local farmers had used as fertilizers. I try very hard to get the facts right, and I am very sorry for this error.

In a statement to the *Spirit*, Rockwool's Michael Zarin also pointed out what he considers other problems with my Sept. 5 column.

He wrote that, "It is also false that the EU has banned formaldehyde." Formaldehyde is a known carcinogen, apparently bad enough that Rockwool has changed its manufacturing process to entirely eliminate formaldehyde emissions for some of its more expensive product variations.

The Rockwool presentations

given here mention formaldehyde emissions in soothing terms that claim low emission levels the plant is fully tuned. Information from the Croatia factory indicates that the testing process, which produces higher emissions, can go on for years.

The fact that Rockwool's presentations to our community talk about formaldehyde implies that Rockwool's plans for Ranson will not use that new formaldehyde-free process. Our community remains very concerned.

Zarin also called my statement that "Croatia is not subject to EU laws" as false. This refers to a quote I had used, from a 2009 article. Here in West Virginia, we are not experts in the status of EU laws, either now or in 2009 when Croatians were trying to shut down the factory there. We just don't want to get into the sort of situation.

He also took issue with my statement that the Ranson facility will be three times larger than the one in Mississippi. Even if it is of a similar size to the one there, our citizens remain deeply concerned about its effect on our community.

Zarin wrote that "it's another demonstrable falsehood to repeat that our workers in Poland suffer 'all sorts of diseases.' This is simply more nonsense." Here in West Virginia, it is hard for us to know whether or not this is a "demonstrable falsehood." Like many working to oppose Rockwool in Ranson, I work hard to translate reports and data from other parts of the world. The things we have learned so far have been deeply concerning. We fully intend to keep investigating.

ROBERT MILLER
Shepherdstown

Rockwool and 'a pattern of avoidance'

During the summer of 2017 activists and citizens tried to stop a pipeline from cutting through Jefferson County. Despite protests, the project moved forward as all these projects seem to do. It was at these protests that I met Tracy Cannon of the Eastern Panhandle Protectors. As a staunch defender of our environment, I grew to appreciate Tracy as a forthright and knowledgeable advocate.

I brought a video camera to an especially energetic meeting in Shepherdstown on July 11, 2017, and recorded the proceedings. During the meeting Mr. Eric Lewis of the Jefferson County Development Authority spoke for proponents of the pipeline and fielded questions from the audience. I remember being impressed by his conviction while being dismayed by some of his answers.

Here we are, more than a year later, and activists and citizens are trying to stop a toxic factory from polluting Jefferson County. Despite protests, the project moves forward as all these projects seem to do. I happened to meet Tracy walking up to the Public Services building in Kearneysville on Aug. 6 and we tried to find space in the crowded room of the JCDA meeting.

Instead of a camera I simply recorded the audio on my phone, intending to use it for notes. Mr. Lewis was there, running the show. During the public comments Tracy spoke of the previous year's pipeline meeting. Rightfully she brought up that the Rockwool plant was an intended recipient of the gas from the pipeline. Concerned citizens had asked what type of businesses the pipeline would bring and were not informed. It is at this point Mr. Lewis interrupted her to say that wasn't true, then dismissively told her to continue.

After the JCDA meeting formally concluded, I approached Mr. Lewis

and asked him how he remembered the Shepherdstown discussion. His version was different than the one I remembered, but my memory isn't the greatest. That's why I like to record things. Upon review of the video it was apparent there were obvious contradictions. Residents not only asked but begged and pleaded for any company name that would ostensibly make it worth risking the sanctity of the Potomac. Rockwool was never mentioned despite an agreement already existing between the multinational manufacturer and the county. Mr. Lewis even dismissed such requests as naïve. On Sept. 6 I shared a simple video presenting these recordings.

This could be viewed as an isolated incident, but there are others. A favorite refrain from Rockwool and local government is that the period for public discussion and debate came and went and now it is simply too late. There is a pattern of avoidance and selective promotion from both Rockwool and our elected officials.

The silence on the Rockwool issue from Mr. Lewis and others last year was blamed upon the nature of their agreement. We're told it's the rules. We're told there's nothing they can do. What residents of Jefferson County have been seeing over the last two years are the rules working against them, with officials who do not represent their interests making decisions without their knowledge.

It is the very nature of these agreements that we must take issue with if we want transparency in the future. Neighbors can disagree, but it must be in good faith. It is good neighbors like Tracy Cannon who help point out the way. Let us hope that we can stop arguing the past and start agreeing on the future.

GUY WERNER
Harpers Ferry

Another view on possible Rockwool suit

There has been a vigorous messaging campaign by the Rockwool communications department that has been picked up and promoted by some members of the Jefferson County Commission and the Jefferson County Development Authority. In essence, it says that their hands are tied because if they don't vote in a certain way the county will face \$100 million in liability. As an attorney, I would say that message is certainly wrong for many reasons, but here are a couple to consider:

First, there are still votes to be taken — water, sewer, building, etc. — and our representatives cannot legally have given away their obligation to represent us by entering a contract that somehow commits them in advance to vote a certain way. No agreement with Rockwool supersedes their obligation to community. That is called vote buying. And Rockwool's recent threat to sue if our representatives don't vote in their favor raises further serious legal questions about Rockwool.

Second, even if Jefferson Coun-

ty (I'm using this term loosely for all governmental entities that may have signed papers with Rockwool) does not comply with terms written on one of the pieces of paper that Rockwool waves around, Rockwool does not just "get" \$100 million. It has multiple, difficult hurdles it would have to surmount, including minimally, showing there is an enforceable agreement; that Rockwool took all the steps and cleared all permits, legally, that it was required to do; that Jefferson County breached; that there was no fraud in the inducement; that it actually incurred real damages and isn't just throwing fairy dust in the air to distract us; and on and on.

Anyone who says we must approve Rockwool or pay up simply does not have a factual basis to make that statement and has not fully reviewed the many alternatives. And the justification that their county lawyers have advised them of a potential risk is no excuse. Providing ultra-cautious advice that serves no greater purpose than to protect the purse

of the county is the easiest kind of advice to give, but it is by no means the only approach that Jefferson County could take.

If Jefferson County has an interest in looking at damage to the communities (and every single one in Jefferson County has officially opposed Rockwool), there are real numbers to the health costs, the tourism costs, the cost of the loss of other growth industries that will be repelled, the cost of litigation brought by individuals and other municipalities for Jefferson County acting ultra vires, the cost of depressed property values and the non-monetary cost of living under the lengthening shadow of 200-foot chimneys, mounds of slag and crushed stone, acres of tractor-trailer parking, and rumbling, massive trucks on our roads. Our representatives have an obligation to consider every one of those, and not be cowed by threats that have already started coming from the wolf at our door.

WILLIAM ADAMS
Shenandoah Junction

Beware 'survival-of-the-fittest' politicians

As a retired college professor of sociology and social work who taught at West Virginia University and Slippery Rock University, I care very deeply about the well-being of my students. I write this because I do not want to see any of the safety-net programs abolished, eliminated, cut or reduced.

Over the past 40 years, I have tried to become an expert on conservative political thought.

I believe it is important to share one important finding I have learned. There now appears to be a much larger number of conservatives who are essentially "survival-of-the-fittest" social Darwinists than there were during the 1950s through 1970s.

This means, I believe, that they want to abolish and eliminate all federal government safety net programs including Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps and college student loans.

You will find many of them in the Congress within the House Freedom Caucus, the old Tea Party and the "Movement conservatives."

You will find a heavy dose of such thinking in conservative think tanks such as Americans For Prosperity, The Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute. While some of these groups are open and transparent about their beliefs, many use stealth tactics to influence public opinion and political decision-making.

Do research as I have done, and you will likely come to the same conclusions. I also highly recommend the books "Dark Money" by Jane Mayer and "Democracy In Chains" by Nancy MacLean.

STEW B. EPSTEIN
Rochester, N.Y.