



Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee

Senator Mary Jo White
Chairman

Patrick Henderson, Executive Director

Room 168 • State Capitol Building
Mailing address: Senate Box 203021 • Harrisburg, PA 17120-3021
Phone: 717-787-9684 • FAX: 717-787-6088

July 27, 2007

Letter to the Editor
The Philadelphia Inquirer
Box 41705
Philadelphia, PA 19101

Dear Editor:

The Inquirer needs to be more consistent – and much less partisan – when critiquing environmental policies (*Increase Tipping Fees – July 26*).

Truth be told, the Inquirer and many conservation groups sat by quietly last year when Governor Rendell diverted \$75 million from the Keystone Fund to the General Fund. Not a single library or park was padlocked because of the transfer. Yet this year, the Inquirer cannot condemn Senate Republicans fast enough over a plan that would shift a modest amount of revenue to the Hazardous Sites Cleanup program – a program that Environmental Protection Secretary McGinty repeatedly warned would be bankrupt on July 1st.

The sad irony is the fact that if the Inquirer had studied the Senate plan, it would realize that under it funding for environmental and conservation projects would have actually *increased* this year. While the Senate plan originally devoted \$40 million to hazardous sites cleanup, Governor Rendell's staff subsequently said they only needed about \$22 million. And passage of the Senate plan – which was agreed to by the Governor – would have freed up \$30 million out of the traditional Growing Greener program that was used to fund hazardous sites cleanup last year. The impact on libraries would have been mitigated by using a portion of the accumulated surplus already in the Keystone Fund. Averting a \$50 million trash tax increase would have been a nice little side benefit, too.

Perhaps most notably, this episode demonstrates everything that is wrong with providing grant programs dedicated funding. It says these programs are more important than education, health care, public safety and other priorities. They are not. It fosters a sense of entitlement - recipients (and state agencies) believe it is their money. It is not. The money belongs to the taxpayers of the Commonwealth, and worthy programs should compete equally for these limited resources as part of the budget process.

The time to budget money this year for hazardous sites cleanup has passed. DEP will now need to finance this program out of its existing \$207 million appropriation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Jo White".

Mary Jo White, Chairman
Senate Environmental Resources
& Energy Committee