



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

December 18, 2007

REPUBLICAN & Herald
Box 209
Pottsville, PA 17901

Dear Editor:

I read with interest your recent editorial regarding funding for toxic sites (December 16, 2007) and the need to establish a dedicated fund for the future.

Providing funding to educate our children, establishing a safety net for the disadvantaged, and ensuring that citizens are protected from violent criminals are all primary responsibilities of state government. So, too, should be cleaning up toxic spills or releases which threaten our communities.

The Republican & Herald argues that the Hazardous Sites Cleanup Act Fund (HSCA) is in peril because it does not have funding in place – for the 2011-2012 fiscal year. I disagree. Each of the priorities mentioned above – education, welfare and public safety – is funded annually out of the General Fund budget. Ideally, so too should the HSCA program. It should be regarded as so important as to be entitled to its fair share of the Commonwealth's \$27 billion annual budget. Unfortunately, that has not been the case when the Governor presented his proposed budgets over the last five years. It is also worth noting that much of the money spent out of HSCA is for personnel – not cleanup costs. Few state employees have the assurance of funding for the next four years like HSCA now has. The HSCA law also appropriately requires those responsible for toxic spills to pay fines, in addition to reimbursing the state for all cleanup costs.

The Senate approved the HSCA funding bill unanimously in October. While I am grateful that the House finally permitted this bill to move forward, it never should have approached a crisis level. The Auditor General has also agreed to perform an audit of the HSCA fund. This should provide the legislature with valuable insight on how current money is being spent, and what the true need is down the road.

Sincerely,

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

Mary Jo White, Chairman
Senate Environmental Resources
& Energy Committee