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letters
the score
rosie right
hr department
calendar
contact style
how to advertise
classifieds
personals

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Republican Wants to Clear the Air

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Virginia Delegate Jack Reid (R-Henrico) had a special constituent in mind when he introduced a bill requiring electric power plants to significantly reduce harmful emissions.

Three years ago, Reid's wife, Judi, was diagnosed with a genetic form of emphysema exacerbated by toxins in the air. "She never smoked, never did anything to bring this on herself other than have her parents," Reid says.



As the General Assembly convened last week, he proposed requiring coal-fired plants in Virginia to cut sulfur dioxide emissions by 86 percent and nitrogen oxide emissions by 71 percent by the year 2011.

The Sierra Club and the American Lung Association support the bill. The pro-business Reid expects the business community to back it too. "It's a health issue and it's an environment issue," he says, "but it's also a business issue."

"We're getting tremendous support from businesses out in Shenandoah Valley," Reid says, especially from wineries whose grapes are hurt by air pollution.

The tourism industry also has a stake: Shenandoah National Park has been ranked as the nation's third most polluted park. Frommer's travel guide warns that the air is frequently smoggy in summer, obscuring mountaintop views.


Reid notes that Virginia's neighbors are taking action.

"North Carolina two years ago passed a bill with the support of Duke Power," he says. Maryland is considering similar legislation to curb power-plant pollution.

"We're sitting here in the middle of them and ignore it," Reid says. "There's a lot of lip service paid to quality of life, and it's time we took steps to actually ensure it."

North Carolina required power plants to install scrubbers in their smokestacks to filter nitrogen oxide, sulfur dioxide and mercury emissions. "The technology exists," Reid says. "It's off-the-shelf stuff."

In contrast to North Carolina's Duke Power, Dominion Virginia



Power opposes such legislation. Officials at Virginia's major electric utility say that air pollution should be addressed by federal agencies, not piecemeal by states.

The Environmental Protection Agency will circulate its rules on air pollution this spring, says Dan Genest, a Dominion spokesman. He says those rules will affect 29 states.

"Air pollution is not strictly a Richmond issue or a Virginia issue," Genest says. He contends that Reid's bill "would establish the most stringent controls on the East Coast, which we believe puts Virginia at an economic disadvantage."

But a recent Mason-Dixon poll showed that 66 percent of Virginians would be willing to spend a couple of extra dollars on their electric bills to clean up the air. Reid says he was surprised when he saw the poll results and predicts other legislators will be, too.

"Virginians get it," Reid says. "The cost will not be in any way extraordinary, and we're going to take this issue all over the state to make sure they understand that." — *Amy Biegelsen*