New Subscribers: GET FOUR WEEKS FREE
Get The New Mexican delivered
click Subscribe or Renew
Click on Start or Renew

The New Mexican Editorial | Thurs, Feb 13

A Blatant Assault on Mining Law

The New Mexican 02/13/2003

During the decade since the passage of a law making mines responsible for their environmental messes, mining interests have done their best, or worst, to water down that landmark state legislation.

A responsible majority of New Mexico's senators and representatives have withstood the lobbying assaults; transparent attempts to make the public pay for mine and smelter cleanup, or to simply leave our land and water contaminated by the poisons it takes to separate metal from rock.

The mining industry's latest move is so blatant that its sponsor should have been too embarrassed to introduce it - and the Roundhouse is rife with rumors that SB473 was dropped in the hopper by accident: Its drafters and its sponsor failed to check signals on an appropriate time.

This bill would establish "mining districts." Within their borders - maybe even beyond - the environmental protection and reclamation requirements of the New Mexico Mining Act wouldn't apply. Simply declare this hole in the ground, that slag heap, or yonder land yet to be gouged, a mining district - and tell the state Environment Department to fly a kite.

And our state's Water Quality Act? The mines would be exempt from their groundwater protection and mine-closure requirements.

This is license to pillage and plunder; a return to the good ol' days of Ulysses Grant, when Wall Street's captains of industry were given their way with the West.

They still have it - except in New Mexico. Here, the Sierra Club and like-minded conservationists enlisted then-Rep. Gary King and some other lawmakers with the courage to call Big Copper to account.

This was blasphemous to an industry which had run New Mexico since territorial days - yet reclamation of mining lands became law.

And now, in 43 pages introduced by Sen. Ben Altamirano of Mining Country, the anti-law.

Choirs of angels echo in the hallways of Phelps Dodge.

From the windows of executive offices in Phoenix, rainbows may be seen in all directions. Shafts of sunlight pierce the clouds.

Bonuses are about to be showered upon those who came up with this legislative nugget.

It's a dream-bubble bound to be popped. In fact, Phelps Dodge, with whom Environment Secretary Ron Curry is negotiating cleanup liability issues left over from the last administration, is behaving sheepishly over this bill.

See ads from the newspaper online
See ads that appear in The New Mexican

EXHIBIT
tabbies
E

Real Estate Features
Virtual Tours
$1,000,000+
VTours under $300K
more...

OPEN HOUSE
Open Houses w/ Virtual Tours
For Realtors

WATER/FIRE
Water Archive
Rules & Statistics
Fire Archive

MARKETPLACE
MARKETPLACE

BUSINESS DIRECTORY
Our Advertisers
Categories
Automotive
more...

FUN AND GAMES
Crosswords
Horoscopes
Fun And Games
more...

PERSONAL FINANCE
Top Finance News
Reports and Articles
Education
more...

LIFESTYLES
Senior Living
Lifestyles
Health and Fitness
more...

SPORTS WIRE!
Top Sports
Football
College Basketball
more...

CIRCULATION
Delivery Problems
Subscribe
Newspapers in school
more...

ABOUT US
Contact Us
Letter to Editor
Advertise!
more...

Company execs really hadn't intended for it to be introduced - at least until they had an idea how seriously Curry would take his new job.

We think he's taking it very seriously. He's no firebrand - in fact, his reasoned approach to problem-solving used to drive Debbie Jaramillo to distraction when she was mayor and he was Santa Fe's city manager. He's willing to hear mining companies sing the blues about copper prices and jobs put at risk by environmental compliance.

But count on Curry to be firm about contamination of New Mexico's air, ground and water - and to oppose efforts to put industrial despoilers outside the law. He can count on several influential senators and representatives to speak against this bill. He also should be able to count on Gov. Bill Richardson's veto - and, for that matter, Richardson's refusal to cut any side deals letting Phelps Dodge off the hook for cleanup costs.

As long as SB473 is alive, however, there's always the chance it will sneak through the legislative process, committing mischief along the way.

New Mexico's delicate desert environment suffers enough at the hand of the mineral industry. Mine reclamation is the least it can do.

If Sen. Altamirano doesn't withdraw this bill, legislative leaders should consign it to the back of a bottom drawer.

Want to use this article? Click here for options!
Copyright 2003 Santa Fe New Mexican

Reader Opinions

Be the first person to voice your opinion on this story!

Back to top

Submit your classified HERE

Copyright & Disclaimer

click here to go to New Mexican online archives

Copyright © 1995 - 2003 PowerOne Media, Inc. All Rights Reserved.