

Senator Maziarz: Keep your promise

What a difference a year makes.

It was the spring of 2006 when state Assemblywoman Francine DelMonte, D-Lewiston, and Sen. George Maziarz, R-Newfane, introduced bills in their respective houses of the Legislature dealing with the siting of hazardous waste landfills.

The bill essentially banned the establishment of those landfills if they would have the potential to discharge toxic material into the Great Lakes system. The only exception would be if the company building the landfill could guarantee it would not leak.

Albany lawmakers apparently liked the bill. It passed unanimously in the Assembly and with only one "no" vote in the Senate. But then Gov. George Pataki saw it differently and vetoed the measure. Both DelMonte and Maziarz promised to bring the same bill up before the Legislature this year.

Fast forward to 2007. DelMonte kept her promise but, instead of reintroducing last year's bill, Maziarz put forth a whole new bill with new regulations and parameters. The move has area environmental groups incensed. They say the new Maziarz measure would weaken protection against toxic substances, particularly PCBs, from reaching the Niagara River and Lake Ontario.

The question we've asked, and continue to ask: What's changed?

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Does a bill that passed the state Legislature with near unanimity become suddenly in need of a massive overhaul? Has the situation regarding Niagara County's dubious distinction of hosting the state's only independent active hazardous waste landfill changed? Has Chemical Waste Management suddenly pulled the plug on its plans to expand? The answer to all three is no.

So why won't Senator Maziarz honor his 2006 pledge and resubmit his original bill in 2007? The conspiracy theorists among us might point to the massive amounts of political contributions that CWM's parent firm, Waste Management, makes to candidates across the country.

As for Maziarz, he feels what he has submitted is an improvement over his previous plan and what he's doing this year is better than last.

We disagree.

The law we supported last year will work just fine this year: It's simple, clear and protects Niagara County's environment. It might even help to scrub up the tarnished image of a county still dirtied by the stain of Love Canal and all the other toxic waste landfills that proliferated across our community in the 1940s through the 1980s.

We urge Senator Maziarz to do what he promised: Resubmit his 2006 bill to the state Senate this year. Let it stand or fall on its own merits. Who knows, this time the new governor might even sign it into law.

Because in this case, the difference a year makes isn't that much different after all.

SUNDAY

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