



Carmage Walls
Commentary Prize

2019 Entry Form

Name of Author(s): William H. (Dink) NeSmith Jr.

Author's Title (editor, columnist, etc.): Columnist/Owner

Newspaper: The Press-Sentinel

Address: 252 W. Walnut Street

City: Jesup

State: GA

ZIP: 31545

Phone: 912-427-3757

Fax: 912-427-4092

E-Mail: ericdenty@thepress-sentinel.com

Submitted by: Eric Denty

Title of Person Submitting: Publisher

Phone Number: 912-427-3757

E-mail Address: ericdenty@thepress-sentinel.com

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Is your newspaper under 50,000 circulation or above 50,000 circulation? Yes

Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.)

May 1, 2019

TO: SNPA's Carmage Walls Commentary Prize Committee

FROM: Eric Denty, publisher, *The Press-Sentinel*, Jesup, Georgia

The first edition of *The Jesup Sentinel* was published in 1865. That makes us the oldest business in Wayne County. While our circulation of 6,000 may be small by big-city standards, we believe our responsibilities are huge for our county of 33,000. So when our community came under challenge from a multibillion-dollar waste-management conglomerate, we knew what we would do. We stood up, ready for a fight. We didn't just say no; we said, "*Hell no!*"

At the outset—40 months ago—we were told, "There's nothing you can do." Local elected officials were ready to hoist a white flag. After all, the largest shareholder in Republic

Services Inc. is one of the world's richest men—Bill Gates. His company, with its proposed massive rail spur, aimed to make our community the largest depository of toxic coal ash in America. Coal ash is laden with a long list of dangerous heavy metals.

The furor started on Jan. 9, 2016, when *The Press-Sentinel* discovered that an unknown Republic subsidiary, Central Virginia Properties LLC, had filed a wetlands-destroying application with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The stealth move was to build four sets of railroad tracks—one mile long each—through 25 acres of wetlands.

The proposed rail spur would allow Republic to haul in 100 cars per day with an estimated 10,000 tons of toxic coal ash to dump in its Broadhurst Environmental Landfill. The rail spur would also open the community to becoming the East Coast's trash bin, stretching from Miami to New York.

In the discovery of the 2016 proposal, the newspaper learned that Republic—several years earlier—had quietly trucked in 800,000 tons of toxic coal ash from Florida. Already there had been an unknown-to-the-public leakage of poisonous beryllium at the landfill. It took a reporter digging through 1,000 pages in Atlanta to unearth that information.

We believe Carmage Walls would be proud of *The Press-Sentinel's* fearless campaign to stand up in a modern-day David-and-Goliath battle. The fight has been spearheaded by our principal owner and chairman of our board of directors, Dink NeSmith.

NeSmith said, "We threw our hearts into the battle, and our wallet followed."

NeSmith and the staff pounced into action. The first step was to sound the alarm: "Only 21 days left to file public comments to the Corps of Engineers." Within days, a team of environmental lawyers was hired by the newspaper. With the help of those attorneys, the 30-day deadline was stretched twice to 90 days, allowing time for more comments and for the newspaper to promote a town-hall meeting.

Here's a brief summary of some of what others thought could *not* be done:

- Got Republic Services Inc.'s attention
- The Press-Sentinel* hired a team of environmental lawyers
- The newspaper poured ink and dollars (more than \$100,000 and increasing) into the campaign
- Raised more than \$1 million in private commitments to wage the legal fight
- Helped organize a grassroots organization of 600-plus citizens to fight toxic coal ash
- Engaged Earthjustice and other environmental groups
- Published *three* ad-free special educational editions
- Published more than 50 news articles
- Published more than 25 editorials
- Commissioned an artist for more than 100 editorial cartoons
- So far, NeSmith has written 98 columns on the issue
- Multiple letters and packages have been sent to Bill Gates and Republic's directors.
- Contacted President Jimmy Carter, who agreed to write to and talk with Gates.
- Traveled to Kentucky to get advice from author/environmentalist Wendell Berry.
- Met five times with a top executive of Republic Services Inc.
- Testified four times before Georgia's Environmental Protection Division
- Traveled to Arlington, Virginia, to testify at an EPA coal-ash rule hearing
- Interviewed by NPR several times
- National coverage, including the *Washington Post*, *InsideClimate News* and *Huffington Post*
- Writing book—*Kicking Ash & Taking Names*—to inspire communities facing corporate giants

In the first meeting with Republic's area president in April 2016, he said, "We are

willing to negotiate.”

NeSmith asked, “Are you willing to withdraw the rail-spur application from the Corps?”

“Absolutely not.”

“Are you willing to withdraw the coal-ash permit application from the EPD?”

“Absolutely not.”

“Are you willing to renegotiate the egregious 50-year contract with the county?”

“Absolutely not.”

With the third no, NeSmith leaned over and said, *“Then, we are at war.”*

Fast-forward a year, and in April 2017, Republic did three things:

1. Withdrew the rail-spur application with the Corps
2. Withdrew the coal-ash application with the EPD
3. Agreed to renegotiate the lopsided contract with the county

As they say, the devil is in the details. Another round of negotiations is set for May 2, 2019. There is an air of optimism, because the same Republic official—now a company vice president with responsibilities over its 42-state footprint—has told NeSmith, “It would be political suicide to bring more coal ash into Wayne County.” And NeSmith said, “Put that in writing.”

With the dumping of toxic coal ash halted in Wayne County, NeSmith and the newspaper have kept the pressure on Republic to “do the right thing.” In the meantime, editorial focus has expanded to include Georgia’s General Assembly. Lawmakers have “played footsie” with Georgia Power, one of the largest producers of toxic coal ash in the country, by failing to strengthen the state’s regulations. *The Press-Sentinel* and NeSmith’s unrelenting commentary have helped to raise public awareness across the state. More and more citizens are demanding safer handling and disposal of the dangerous waste.

Submitted as entries in 2019’s Carmage Walls Commentary Prize contest are six (6) of Dink NeSmith’s 98 columns in the David-and-Goliath Battle, circa 2016. NeSmith believes that if you can’t stand up for the people and places you love, you ought to turn off your press. Standing up for Wayne County has paid off. Since the fight began in 2016, not one inch of the proposed rail spur has been built, and not one additional ounce of toxic coal ash has been dumped in the community’s environment.

NeSmith summarizes the past 40 months as: “We’re just doing what newspapers are supposed to do.”

Thanks for your consideration of his entries.

Hurricane Florence proved storm's predictions

By Dink NeSmith

On the eve of the Disco Era, romantics swooned over Jenny and Oliver. The hearts of ladies went to mush as they watched Ryan O'Neal. Men didn't fare much better when Ali MacGraw wrapped her arms around O'Neal in Hollywood's 1970 smash hit *Love Story*.

How do I know?

I was a 22-year-old who thought Ali was one of the most gorgeous women on the globe. And why—48 years later—would I bring up *Love Story* when what I really want to talk about is Hurricane Florence?

There's an immortal line in the movie.

Millions can recite those eight words, but I'm going to save it for later. Bear with me for a few minutes.

During Florence's wrath, I lost touch with two friends—a husband and wife—who had their toes-in-the-sand retirement bliss assaulted by winds, waves and horrific amounts of water. Eddie and Carolyn live between Myrtle Beach and Wilmington. They might as well have had a bull's-eye painted on their chests, but I got this miraculous email: *"We survived!"*

My friends are among the fortunate. Florence was predicted to be a killer. She did just that, and flooding continues to add to the nightmare. We grieve for those whose loved ones died.

Another prediction proved true, too. The environment was also a casualty of this brutal storm. For a long time, the warning siren has blared: "Don't put toxic-waste storage facilities in hurricane zones and near water."

What happened at Duke Energy's Sutton plant in Wilmington could have been avoided. The 2,000 cubic yards of toxic coal ash didn't have to pollute the surrounding environment, but it did. Other coal-ash ponds could rupture, too.

Why?

Corporate decision-makers, such as those at Duke, figure they are smarter than Mother Nature. Florence proved them wrong. They put us at risk by locating poison pits near precious water. Hurricanes will continue coming. Houses can be rebuilt. Debris can be cleaned up. Dangerous toxins are a different matter. They sink in and stay.

But get this.

Duke has now released a fear-not statement: "Coal ash is non-hazardous." It believes there's no risk to the

environment or our health. To that denial-laden response, I'd ask, "How much lead, beryllium, arsenic, mercury and other poisonous heavy metals do you want stirred into

How much lead, beryllium, arsenic, mercury and other poisonous heavy metals do you want stirred into your sweet tea?"



your sweet tea?"

Eventually Duke will probably say, "We're sorry." A slap on the wrist will likely follow, while we wait for the next time. And other hurricanes will happen again and again.

Meanwhile, coal-burning utilities will argue, "We are doing what we can to provide the cheapest possible electricity for our consumers." That sounds good until you consider the Fram oil filer slogan: *"Pay me now or pay me later."* Florence is proof we will be paying later—as in forever—for the harm to our natural resources.

Now back to *Love Story*.

If you listen to the feel-good messages of producers of toxic coal-ash, you'd think they really do "love" us. But if that were so, they would consider the consequences of taking the nature-be-damned cheap routes which ultimately damage our health.

No doubt, there will be plenty of "I'm sorry" apologies. But as Oliver repeated Jenny's words to his forgiveness-seeking father, *"Love means never having to say you're sorry."*

dnesmith@cninewspapers.com

(For more commentaries visit www.dinknesmith.com)

We must continue standing up for Wayne County

By Dink NeSmith

If you've been counting, this is my 94th commentary—since January 2016—on toxic coal ash. Some of you have questioned why I have been so fervent. My reply has been and will be: *"If you can't stand up for the people and place you love, for whom and what are you willing to take a stand?"*

I don't care where I might be; the needle of my heart's compass will always point to the 11,563 square miles sandwiched between the Altamaha and Satilla rivers. Wayne County is where my soul is intertwined with my roots.

Standing on the corner of Cherry and Macon streets, I can show you where Dr. Alvin Leaphart lifted me from my mother's womb. As he clutched me by my ankles, I cried. But what was rolling down my chubby cheeks were tears of joy—joy to be born into a loving family and into a wonderful hometown.

If anything has changed in the last 70 years, it would be that my love has grown. And that's why, if I'm breathing, I will be standing up for the people *and* this place that I love so dearly.

So what have we learned in the last 35 months about toxic coal ash?

The first three lessons are:

1. Coal ash is laced with numerous poisonous heavy metals which are harmful to our health.
2. Toxic coal ash should never be stored near water or in sensitive ecosystems.
3. Disasters—manmade or natural—can *and* will put people and the environment at unnecessary risks.

These lessons are why Benjamin Franklin's advice should be stenciled on the back of our dominant hand: *"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."*

There is nothing we can do about the 800,000 tons of toxic coal ash already stored at the Broadhurst

Environmental Landfill. Well, there is one thing. We can continue encouraging Republic Services to be diligent in its maintenance and monitoring. Since the arrival of area vice president Drew Isenhour, I feel considerably better about the Republic's attitude. Drew has demonstrated that he is willing to listen. I believe he wants an amicable resolution, just as we do.

Looking back to the early 1990s, hindsight is

now like a huge, blinking caution light. The landfill should never have been located in or near an area crisscrossed with wetlands and streams flowing to Georgia's coast. Broadhurst also sits atop the Floridan Aquifer, the drinking-water source of millions.

Calamities happen. Consider Duke's Dan River coal-ash tragedy. And then there's the monumental coal-ash disaster in Kingston, Tennessee. Just last week, a federal court ruling underscored how

safety was ignored for workers who were cleaning up that poisonous mess. Profits were put ahead of people's health and lives.

Now consider the tsunami of hurricanes over the past few years. Each was a warning to Coastal Georgia. Imagine if Hurricane Harvey—which flooded Houston—had hit the Golden Isles. What about Hurricane Florence? It washed nasty industrial hog waste and toxic coal ash over the coastal Carolinas.

And think about Hurricane Michael, which left portions of Florida's Panhandle and Southwest Georgia devastated. If angry Michael had picked Brunswick as its bull's-eye, Wayne County—as we know and love it—would have been obliterated.

Benjamin Franklin has been in his grave for 228 years, but the truth of his cautionary words is very much alive today. That's why I stand with you—Wayne County—as we stand up for the people *and* place we love.

dnsmith@cni newspapers.com

(For more commentaries visit www.dinknesmith.com)

“Since the arrival of area vice president Drew Isenhour, I feel considerably better about Republic's attitude. Drew has demonstrated that he is willing to listen. I believe he wants an amicable resolution, just as we do.”

Keep lumps of coal (ash) out of their stockings

By Dink NeSmith

Once upon a Christmastime, visions of sugar plums danced in our heads. We knew that, if we were more naughty than nice, Santa was going to forget the “sugar plums.” Instead, he’d fill our stockings with switches and lumps of coal.

I grew up in the OK-to-switch era. My grandmother’s switch of choice was from her backyard plum tree. There was nothing “sugar” about those limber plum limbs. Santa could keep the switches.

Ditto for that the lumps-of-coal thing. I was all about the Sears’ Wish Book. In the hefty catalog were bicycles, BB guns and roller skates. In fact, I never really thought *that* much about coal until I read John Grisham’s *Gray Mountain*.

I knew coal mining was a major industry where the work was dirty and often hazardous. I also knew that coal provided cheap generation of electricity. But—for the most part—I had not paid much attention to the pollution issues.

In 2014, by the time I had turned the last page, Grisham had rattled me awake to the ugly downside of coal burning—especially the toxic substance left behind. Coal ash can destroy people’s health and poison the environment.

Yes, I know.

Grisham is a novelist, but the foundation of *Gray Mountain* is based on real-life facts. And that’s how I learned of the dangers of coal ash. So when I heard Wayne County was destined to become a major coal-ash dump, I knew the community had to rally to defend our natural resources *and* our lives. That was 35 months ago.

Thank goodness you made your voices heard. And we are grateful Republic Services Inc. listened. I have faith there will be an amicable resolution to the issue in the new year. While the devil is always in the details,

we cannot lose our focus on what must be done.

For years, coal-burning industries operated—more or less—beneath the radar of general public conversation. Not anymore. America is talking about coal ash. A day rarely goes by that someone doesn’t send me a news article on the subject.

Last week I received a report from Earthjustice and the Environmental Integrity Project entitled “Georgia at a Crossroads.” It is time to decide whether we are going to strengthen our coal-ash laws. According to the report, “11 of Georgia’s 12 coal-fired power plants have contaminated groundwater with one or more toxic pollutants.” All but one of these plants are Georgia Power-owned.

Almost simultaneously, Georgia Power released an update on the progress of shutting down all of its 29 coal-ash ponds. Aaron Mitchell, the company’s general manager of environmental affairs, was quoted: “*The intent for every single closure—whether excavation or closing in place with advanced engineering measures—is to make sure groundwater is protected during and throughout the life of that closure.*”

So how long is that?

Mitchell said: “Once the ponds are closed, we will continue to monitor groundwater around them to ensure the quality for at least 30 years.” I am glad Georgia Power is taking proactive measures, but many of us will be gone in 30 years. What about our grandchildren? How about our great-grandchildren’s grandchildren?

Do they deserve pollution from lumps of coal (ash)—Christmas after Christmas—for generation after generation?

If our generation allows that to happen, shame on us.

We would deserve to be switched.

dnsmith@cninewspapers.com

(For more commentaries visit www.dinknesmith.com)

Results of groundwater tests



“We found groundwater contamination at 11 of 12 coal plants with available data. Ten of 11 plants have unsafe levels of one or more of the following pollutants:

“**Antimony**, which developmental toxicity (reduced fetal growth) and metabolic toxicity (reduced blood glucose levels). Antimony can also irritate the skin.

“**Arsenic**, which causes multiple types of cancer, neurological damage, and other health effects.

“**Boron**, which poses developmental risks to humans, such as low birth weight, can result in stunted growth and plant toxicity in aquatic ecosystems.

“**Cobalt**, which harms the heart, blood, thyroid, and other parts of the body.

“**Lithium**, which presents multiple health risks including neurological problems.

“**Molybdenum**, which damages the kidney and liver at high concentrations.

“**Radium**, which causes cancer and is a radioactive element.

“**Selenium**, which harms fish and other aquatic organisms at very low concentrations and is bioaccumulative. Selenium can also be toxic to humans.

“**Sulfate**, which causes diarrhea, and can be very dangerous to young children.”

(Source: Environmental Integrity Project and Earthjustice)

'Chickens coming home to roost' on toxic coal ash

By Dink NeSmith

Born in the horse-and-buggy days of 1900, my mother's mama was a God-fearing and earthy soul. If she had something to say, Nanny didn't hold back. Her fiery tongue could curl the bark on a chinaberry tree. My grandmother died in 1983, but she "lives" inside my head. I can hear her pontificating on a variety of subjects.

I can imagine what she'd have to say about this toxic-coal-ash debacle, especially about the leaking ponds on Georgia Power properties scattered around the state. She'd say, *"Well, the chickens are coming home to roost."* And to punctuate her words, she'd fork two fingers, press them to her lips and spew a stream of strawberry-snuff juice into a pillow of Kleenex stuffed in a Maxwell House coffee jar.

Snuff juice is nasty.

Coal ash is nasty *and* dangerous.

To see how cavalier so many members of Georgia's General Assembly have been about governing coal ash is enough to make a preacher cuss. For three years, I've watched a forthright few try to do the right thing, introducing new laws to protect Georgians and our environment.

Time and time again, those measures were neutered or killed in the Natural Resources and Environment Committee of the House of Representatives. The longtime chair, Rep. Lynn Smith, appeared to listen to industrial lobbyists more than considering what's in the best interest of 10 million Georgians. Nothing seemed to move out of her committee unless two entities, the governor's office and Georgia Power, applied stamps of approval.

I join others in congratulating Gov. Nathan Deal. History will record him as one of our most successful governors. His accomplishments are obvious. So is his loyalty to our state's largest utility. Should Gov. Deal and his longtime chief of staff, Chris Riley, become political consultants, don't be surprised if Georgia Power is one of their prized clients.

Just before the start of the 2019 Gold Dome session comes a not-so-surprising announcement.

A press release from the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) read: "At least 10 of Georgia Power's toxic, unlined coal-ash ponds sit dangerously close to the groundwater beneath them, according to the utility's recent filings required under the federal Coal Combustion residuals rule."

Furthermore, SELC senior attorney Chris Bowers said, "Georgia Power's coal-ash ponds were built in the worst possible places—near streams, lakes, floodplains, next to rivers and right above groundwater ... we now know that at least 10 of its ponds sit too close to the groundwater aquifer." Four of these ponds are along the Chattahoochee River at Plant Yates near Newnan, where Rep. Lynn Smith lives.

You have heard me say this before: *"Georgia Power is a tremendous asset of our state, and it's a vital gear in our economic engine. I appreciate its important role, so I am not against Georgia Power. I am not against Rep. Smith, either. Instead, I am for responsible handling of toxic coal ash."*

The issue has been suppressed for too long. Coal may have been our ticket to cheaper electricity, but now there's the expense of cleaning up the mess. You don't solve the coal-ash pollution problem by creating another problem. That's what happens when you dump toxic coal ash on other communities such as Wayne County.

For three years, we've observed Rep. Lynn Smith and her committee playing political footsie with lobbyists and downplaying the need for stronger toxic-coal-ash laws. Neighboring states are using our Peach State for a dumping ground. That ought to make you mad enough for your words to curl the bark on chinaberry trees.

I wish no ill fortune or pollution on any community, but maybe there's a lesson for Rep. Smith to be gleaned from what's happening in Coweta County. We aren't in her district, but Georgia's natural resources and environment belong to all of us. Perhaps you'd like to reach out to lynn.smith@house.ga.gov.

In the meantime, Nanny would say, *"Honey, the chickens are coming home to roost."*

dnesmith@cninewspapers.com

(For more commentaries visit www.dinknesmith.com)

By Dink NeSmith

If you care about the messy similarity of politics and sausage making, I recommend you read *Who Runs Georgia?* Calvin Kytle and James A. Mackay’s book—about 1947 politics—underscores that Gold Dome hijinks haven’t changed much in the past 72 years.

When the current coal-ash controversy kicked into high gear in 2016, a former governor called and asked, “Have you read *Who Runs Georgia?*”

I said, “Yes, years ago.”

“Well, read it *again*,” he said. “You’ll see why you’ll have trouble getting any new laws to protect the environment against coal-ash pollution.”

Not only did I reread the paperback; I bought a dozen copies to distribute.

The recurring theme is that *big* money of *big* businesses has a *big* say in how Georgia was run back then and today.

Delta is an example. The airline stacks billions of dollars on its bottom line. That’s good for our state’s economy, employing thousands of Georgians. We are proud to have Delta as a part of Georgia’s brand. When I fly, Delta is my first choice. I show my loyalty and appreciation for a Georgia-based company.

Delta—with its enormous profits—has, again, rattled its tin cup under the Gold Dome to get an estimated \$40 million jet-fuel tax break. Why? The simplest answer is that Delta knew it could ask, twist the right arms *and* receive. Other airlines benefit, too. Read about that kind of behavior in *Who Runs Georgia?*

Georgia Power is another example of “who runs Georgia,” since way before 1947. Look at what’s happened in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019. Every proposed bill pertaining to coal ash has been gutted or killed. Nothing moves out of the House’s committee on Natural Resources and Environment unless it gets Georgia Power’s stamp of approval. The Senate’s committee reflects the same.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Fred Wilson, assistant to the president of Georgia Power, was known as the company’s General Assembly “fixer.” He reportedly “controlled” at least 50 men in the legislature, whom

he could count on when his company came under fire. Fred Wilson is dead, but the utility giant’s “fixing” strategy still lives.

Who Runs Georgia? tells of Georgia Power’s historical practice of retaining hordes of lawyers and lobbyists, even if they aren’t used. The ploy of the past is the same plan today—to keep those people from working against them. When the company got special-legislation protection on cost overruns at Plant Vogtle, an estimated 80 lobbyists were employed.

In 2019, you’ll run out of fingers and toes counting Georgia Power’s registered lobbyists. I could count at least 30 influence peddlers. There appears to be no limit on spending for lobbyists.

Consider Newnan and Coweta County, home of Rep. Lynn Smith. She chairs the House’s Natural Resources and Environment committee. Georgia Power has a coal-fired plant in Newnan, along with leaking toxic coal-ash ponds. Arthur “Skin” Edge, an attorney/lobbyist, also lives in Newnan.

Georgia Power knows the value of having Edge and others—well-connected and powerful—on its payroll. That’s why former Gov. Nathan Deal and his chief of staff, Chris Riley, are expected to be retained as lobbyists, too.

I was warned, “*Rep. Smith doesn’t like to hear from people outside her district. It makes her mad.*” Because she refuses to answer my emails—requesting an appointment—that assessment seems to be true.

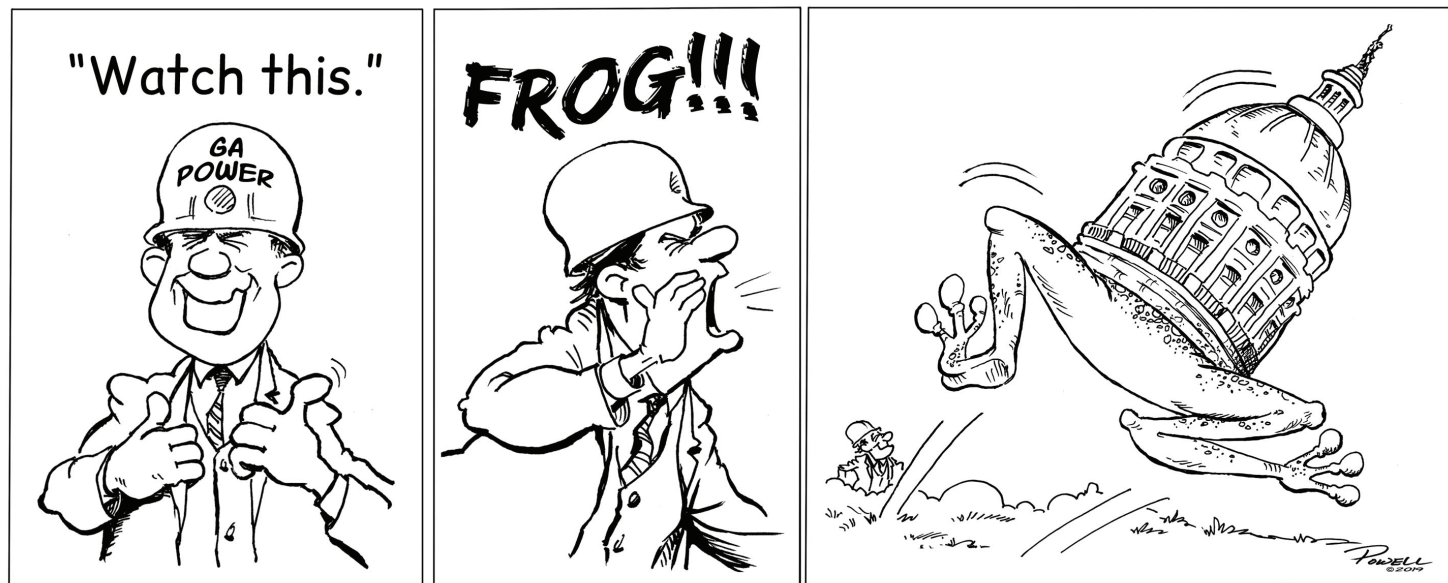
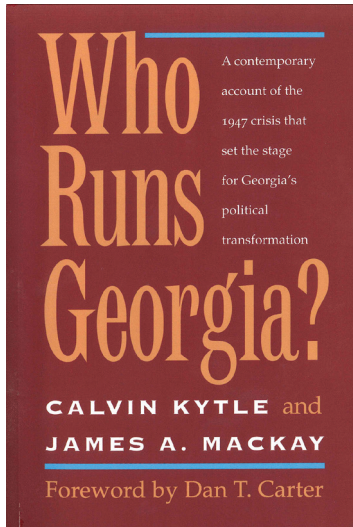
Georgia’s natural resources and environment are not the property of just House District 70. Those precious assets belong to 10 million Georgians. All voices should be heard.

Just as I enjoy supporting and flying on Delta, I really appreciate the good Georgia Power does. We need strong corporations to enhance our state, but it’s time to cleanse the messy sausage making of laws, as outlined in *Who Runs Georgia?*

The Gold Dome must quit jumping every time Georgia Power and other corporate powerhouses yell, “Frog!”

dnesmith@cninewspapers.com

(For more commentaries visit www.dinknesmith.com)



Every day should be Earth Day

By Dink NeSmith

Early-morning rituals are usually identical. High on the list is to get the dogs outside. That's where I was Monday, watching the sunrise on my left and seeing the waning moon on my right. The dogs were sniffing when I felt a vibration in my pocket.

A friend was sending me his Earth Day devotional reading. The scripture was Psalm 24:1 (NRSV): *"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it."*

By this time, the dogs had wandered back and were sitting at my feet. Impulsively, I slipped out of my shoes. I wanted to feel the earth. My eyes were already open, but the cool, wet grass opened my ears, too. A chorus of birds was busy making sounds, and the neighbor's Black Angus cattle were mooing across the way.

Back inside, I felt another vibration. A mutual friend joined the three-way conversation. The early riser said, *"I would like to leave this earth that God gave us the stewardship of as a better place for my children and grandchildren than I found it."* Unfortunately, all God's children don't say *"Amen!"* to that ambition.

The truth is that every day should be Earth Day. As we live our lives, we need to remember that we are just passing through. Don't future generations deserve "a better place" than we found it?

That is the reason you and I are alarmed by the nonchalant attitude of so many of our leaders when it comes to the handling and disposing of toxic coal ash. Granted, we have benefited from coal-generated electricity, but we cannot ignore the dangerous downside.

There's an effort to move away from coal. That's the good news. But follow what's been going on across America, and you'll learn of the perilous consequences

of irresponsible handling of toxic coal ash. Tennessee, Virginia and the Carolinas are among the states with horror stories.

The Carolinas and Florida have decided what to do with their unwanted coal ash: *Dump as much as they can in Georgia*. While I was standing on the wet grass—less than 40 miles away—a convoy of side-dumping trucks was making its way out of the Carolinas into Georgia on I-85 South, destination Banks County. This stream of waste—laden with lead, beryllium, arsenic, cobalt, radium, boron and assorted bad stuff—is being stockpiled in our Peach State.

And what are our lawmakers doing about that? *Nothing.*

They say that interstate-commerce laws prevent

Georgia from stopping the out-of-state dumping. What they don't tell you is that the General Assembly's catering to our own toxic-coal-ash producer—Georgia Power—has rolled out the welcome mat to other states.

Regular solid municipal waste—by law—is charged \$2.50 per ton. But for coal ash to be dumped, in approved landfills, the fee is a nominal \$1 per

ton. Neighbors are jumping on the bargain—disposing what they don't want polluting their states.

Meanwhile, our leaders continue playing footsie with industrial lobbyists. Repeated efforts to strengthen toxic-coal-ash handling are squashed. As a result, Georgians and our environment suffer the disastrous consequences.

I repeat: *Every day should be Earth Day.*

It's past time for our lawmakers to accept their roles as responsible stewards of Georgia earth, air and water. Maybe they should take a walk—barefoot—on the wet grass and wake up to the irreplaceable natural resources which God has bestowed upon us.

But first, they must pull their heads out of the sand.

dnsmith@cninewspapers.com

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