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Opinion: Conversation around legislation

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Recent reporting, letters to the editor, and testimony in the New Hampshire Legislature regarding Senate Bill 61, a bill relative to surface water setbacks for landfills, have highlighted how revisionist history and cognitive bias drives much of what we consume from today's media and how it influences opinions.

For example, a right-to-know request in which emails show a back-and-forth exchange between a Casella representative and the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (DES) was used to rally an emotional response from the New Hampshire House of Representatives to eventually kill SB 61.

Communication between regulators and the regulated community is not only common in these kinds of proceedings, but it is also an important and necessary part of the process.

Imagine, for example, legislation being passed relative to electrical transmission and those responsible for transmitting electricity are not included in the discussion, and the results are widespread blackouts that could have been avoided through a simple conversation. This is the reality of what occurred in New Hampshire around SB 61.

There are likely hundreds of email exchanges that occurred with other businesses, individuals, and activist groups that are conveniently left out because that reality is far from what activists want to make people believe. The more people they can bring into their echo chamber, the more their bias can become the reality of others, weaponized in legislative proceedings, and repeated in the media.

As was the case with previous landfill siting bills that have been brought forward in New Hampshire, Casella determined that it was appropriate to weigh in on SB 61. There is nothing unusual or nefarious about a company weighing in on New Hampshire laws that will impact the very service that it is devoted to providing to New Hampshire residents.

What made SB 61 different than its predecessor bills is that the latter were written by activist groups and were specifically focused on stopping Casella's proposed Granite State Landfill project. SB 61 was a bipartisan effort that resulted from the combining of two landfill siting bills that were presented in New Hampshire and had the broad support of myriad stakeholders.

Make no mistake, this bill did nothing to make siting the Granite State Landfill easier for Casella. The bill would have achieved much of what was being sought by previous bills and, ironically, what is now being requested by these same activist groups in the ongoing rulemaking process.

What SB 61 didn't do was weaponize the legislature and directly target a single project, and that's why those who have sought to use the New Hampshire Legislature as a mechanism to stop the proposed Granite State Landfill decided to make public claims of collusion and unethical conduct.

The claims are baseless and show that these groups are willing to resort to ad hominem attacks on regulatory agencies, companies, and private citizens alike to kill balanced advancements in siting criteria if it means that they don't specifically meet their goal of stopping this single project.

We hope that the balanced and logical residents of New Hampshire can see this kind of weaponization of the legislature and media for what it really is.

In the meantime, we will continue to provide outstanding service to the more than 50,000 New Hampshire businesses and residents who rely upon us to protect human health and the environment, and we will continue to answer to, and work with, the regulatory agencies who oversee that process regardless of how others wish to spin it.

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