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An Open Letter to John Casella - Michael Wright

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An Open Letter to John Casella

To the Editor:

John Casella's company is entitled to lobby as hard as it can to get the New Hampshire Legislature to do its bidding and to get NH's Department of Environmental Services to issue permits to extend operations at its NCES landfill in Bethlehem and also to issue new permits for its proposed GSL landfill in Dalton. It's up to state officials to decide when that lobbying goes over the line and becomes undue corporate influence, and lucky for all of us that is exactly what the NH House did in killing SB61 in an overwhelming bi-partisan vote.

And John Casella is personally entitled to try to make the best case he can to North Country residents how scrupulous his company is, and how needed his company is to "...protect human health and the environment...", which is exactly what he did in his LTE on July 26th entitled "Revisionist History & Cognitive Bias in the Media," whatever that means!

But what he is not entitled to do is to ask North Country residents to believe that there was nothing nefarious about Casella 's participation in drafting, editing, and lobbying on SB61, and in particular that his company was just one of many stakeholders in the process that weighed in with the NH Legislature and NHDES to influence how NH regulates landfills. Why? Because that is a total crock.

A lot of NH Legislators knew SB61 was a highly flawed bill well before the emails between Casella and NHDES were revealed. Their concerns about the bill were heightened by the fact that Casella and Governor Sununu made it absolutely clear they were unwilling to make any significant revisions to SB61 that would make the NHDES rulemaking process more objective, more focused on the public good, and more transparent.

John Casella asks you to believe that there was a conspiracy between environmental activists such as Cheryl Jensen, the media, and the Legislature. Instead of inventing yet another conspiracy theory John Casella should cop to his company's heavy-handedness and a botched lobbying job for the failure of SB61.

According to one former lobbyist who spent years in Concord and says he saw it all, there's a world of difference between the two for-profit landfill operators in NH. Waste Management has a lot of support from NH Legislators (and even environmental activists) because it tends to its business and there are few if any complaints about its operations. On the other hand, Casella operates its NCES landfill so poorly that there are constant complaints, and when Casella gets into trouble, as it often does, it usually starts its offensive with whining and frequently resorts to lawsuits.

John Casella also asks us to believe that all environmental activists care about is stopping the permitting of its proposed GSL landfill. This is belied by the fact that there is broad interest and support for a range of initiatives undertaken by NHDES in the area of solid waste management, and a range of proposed bills being considered by the NH Legislature.

Having said that, the truth is that the GSL project is a turkey and lots of people know it. There is no shortage of landfill capacity in NH, so why Casella is rushing to get GSL permitted probably has a lot more to do with Casella's profits than with the needs of our state. And the site that Casella has chosen defies explanation. Casella seems to think it a good idea to plop the largest new landfill in New England down in a greenfield site in the middle of a sand and gravel pit, which is exactly where experts say not to put a landfill due to the much higher risk of leachate contamination associated with sandy/gravelly soils.

So why does Casella want to build GSL in Dalton? Casella representatives have unabashedly admitted the Dalton site was chosen because Dalton is a small, relatively poor town with virtually no political clout, because Dalton had no zoning ordinance that would allow the town to have a significant voice, and because there was a large landowner willing to sell cheap. Moreover, Casella's own estimates are for a profit potential of \$1 billion if GSL is built.

There is a coalition of grassroots organizations that started in the North Country but now extends across the entire New England region. We're about a lot more than just stopping the GSL project. We're working hard to ensure that NHDES lives up to its mission to protect the environment and the health and quality of life for NH residents. Please join us in this effort.

Sincerely,

Michael Wright

Littleton, N. H.