

GE's LOBBYING STRATEGY

U.S. EPA is expected to issue its final decision on the proposal to dredge the Hudson River in August. Although few will venture to guess how EPA will rule, most observers believe it's unlikely a Bush-era EPA will forcibly follow up on the Clinton EPA's recommendation to dredge the Hudson.

"I think they're paralyzed right now," Hugh Kaufman, an EPA hazardous waste specialist and internal watchdog says of EPA.

As Governor of New Jersey, now-EPA administrator Christine Todd Whitman supported the dredging, because the contamination reached New York Harbor where sediment is dredged to keep the Harbor open for deep shipping channels. "That was her position then, so the question is, will she be consistent," says Judith Enck a policy advisor to New York Attorney General Elliot Spitzer.

Whitman is not likely to feel much pressure from New York governor George Pataki who, although he has taken a position in support of dredging, has done little to back it up. Garey Sheffer, the Pataki administration's voice for environmental matters, accepted a job with GE last year. Sheffer was recruited by GE without applying for the position.

Some observers say EPA may defer a final decision to the regional branch in Manhattan, thus insulating Whitman and the new administration from having to deal with the consequences. Others say the agency is likely to propose a pilot project to demonstrate to local opponents how little impact dredging will have, a decision that would effectively delay a full-scale cleanup for years.

Should Whitman or the regional office choose to follow through, however, GE will probably try to head them off at the pass, in Congress.

"If we see GE stepping up their activities in Congress, it's a good sign that EPA's going to hang tough," says Enck.

It's hard to imagine who will stop GE in Congress. The company has been holstering some big guns inside the beltway to ensure that its interests will be well-represented:

17 lobbyists have been retained to work in Washington for on “contaminated sediments/natural resources damage issue,” including 6 ex-Congressmen.

The team is led by Bob Livingston (the former Louisiana congressman and House Appropriations Committee chair), former New York congressman Gerald Solomon, a long-time GE booster whose district includes the capacitor factories, and ex-Senate minority leader George Mitchell of Maine, who now heads the National Sediments Coalition.

GE’s lobbyists have tried to keep EPA from dredging the Hudson by attaching riders to recent EPA appropriations bills. The rider offered in 2000 would have blocked dredging of contaminated sites across the nation, but was finally dropped under pressure from the Clinton White House. Previously, the riders used the pretext of waiting for a National Academy of Sciences study on PCB-contaminated sediments. Though that study is completed, the GE team is expected to find another pretext for legislation to block EPA action on the Hudson.

In January, dredging opponent Rep. John Sweeney, R-New York, gained a seat on the House Appropriations Committee, the same place where he and Solomon tacked on provisions to tie up dredging in the past.

Although he is unlikely to want a major environmental fight, Congressional observers say President Bush is not likely to exercise his veto power the way Clinton did to oppose anti-environmental measures. Sweeney’s former chief of staff, Brad Card, is the brother of Andrew Card, President Bush’s chief of staff.

GE Lobbyists on Contaminated Sediments/Natural Resources Damage Issues:

Senator George Mitchell, R-ME, Verner, Lipfert, Bernhard, McPherson and Hand law firm.

Rep. Bob Livingston, R-LA, The Livingston Group

Rep. Gerald Solomon, R-NY, The Solomon Group

Rep. Jimmy Hayes, D- LA, Adams and Reese LLP

Rep. Vic Fazio, D-CA, Clark and Weinstock

Rep. Vin Weber, R-MN, Clark and Winstock

Rep. Bill Brewster, D-OK, R. Duffy Wall and Associates

Peter Prowitt, former staff for Senator Mitchell, GE company lobbyist

Rob Wallace, former staff for Senator Wallop, GE company lobbyist
Keith Cole, former House Commerce Committee staff, executive director National Sediments Coalition, Swidler & Berlin law firm;
Phil Cummings, former staff for Senate Environment & Public Works Committee, The Accord Group;
Jim Matthews, former staff for Re. Tom Manton, Clark and Weinstock
Lee Forsgren, former staff Transportaton and Infrastructure Committee, Adams and Reese LLP
George Mannina Jr., former staff, House Merchant Marine Committee, O'Connor & Hannan
Bob Barrie, former GE company lobbyist, O'Conner & Hannan law firm;
Patricia Casano, former Department of Justice staff attorney, GE company lobbyist;
Larry A. Boggs, GE company lobbyist.