



December 15, 2011

### **The Garden Club of Virginia's Petition to the Legislature Concerning Uranium Mining Issues**

The Garden Club of Virginia is an active association of forty-seven garden clubs, whose members collectively form a group of more than 3,300 civic leaders from around the Commonwealth, and has long been one of the most influential and effective organizations for conservation in Virginia.

Currently, the most important conservation issue facing Virginians is the upcoming consideration by the General Assembly to lift the ban on mining uranium in Virginia. The issue is complex and will involve competing studies and advocacy debates with respect to science, health, technology, economics and fundamental questions of how we conserve Virginia's natural resources. The issue is being heavily covered by the press and media and has already become polarized.

On November 3, 2011 the Garden Club of Virginia hosted a forum to clearly, fairly and constructively inform and engage the public on the vitally important issue of uranium mining. Over 240 people attended, including many members of the media and some members of the General Assembly or their staffs. We believe that anyone who attended will confirm that we achieved the goal of presenting both sides of the issue with well-documented research. The members of the Garden Club of Virginia spent over a year preparing for the Forum and invested significantly to perform this public service.

The Virginia Coal and Energy Commission of the General Assembly last year called for objective professional studies to be conducted to inform Virginians in their consideration of the issue.

These studies, collectively costing millions of dollars, will be completed and made public close to the end of the year. There must then be ample time for these year-long studies to be widely distributed, studied, and responded to by parties along the full spectrum of viewpoints. Only then will a vigorous, healthy, constructive, statewide consideration of the issue be possible.

Before any change to the current moratorium is contemplated, please consider the following:

- There is not adequate time before the 2012 General Assembly Session adjourns to fully comprehend the studies of the National Academy of Sciences and the National Research Council and to share the results of those studies with the public.
- The impact of potential health, environmental and economic costs of uranium waste management, regulation and remediation could outweigh the best-case scenario of economic benefits.
- The history of governmental regulation regarding the treatment of uranium waste has led many Virginians to oppose uranium mining and milling in our commonwealth.

While the National Academy of Sciences and other studies will contribute information and perspective to the decisions on which the public must be heard, it was made quite clear at our Forum that this report will be comprised of data and information, but that no recommendations will be made. The hard work of analyzing, debating and defining a solution must be undertaken by citizens throughout Virginia and communicated to their representatives in the General Assembly.

It will take time and resources for many organizations, agencies and individuals to participate. Despite the needed schedule, there will certainly be an attempt to get the General Assembly to act when it convenes in January 2012 – mere weeks after the reports are released. If a bill were to move forward this Session, it would effectively cut the public out of the deliberations on this most important Virginia conservation issue.

The Garden Club of Virginia believes that no action should be taken during the 2012 Session of the Virginia General Assembly on the existing moratorium on uranium mining until the various studies have been completed and analyzed, and the citizens of Virginia, including members of the Garden Club of Virginia, have had full opportunity to be heard after the issue has been presented and debated.

The Garden Club of Virginia strongly recommends and requests that the General Assembly withhold any decisions on uranium mining issues until at least the Session that begins in January 2013.

Sincerely,

Kimbrough K. Nash  
President  
The Garden Club of Virginia

Karen Jones  
Chairman  
Conservation and Beautification Committee  
The Garden Club of Virginia