

Point of View

NC landfill bill would send us back to dumping on the poor

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Rookie Guilford County Sen. Trudy Wade's landfill legislation, SB328, shows us how quickly a regressive piece of legislation can get traction.

Just two weeks ago, Wade introduced a simple, single-page bill to improve controls on garbage trucks. Quickly her bill became an 18-page piece of legislation that eliminates the environmental and social justice controls that have prevented the siting of new landfills in North Carolina.

If the bill passes as written, North Carolina will revert to 20th century practices of siting stinky, polluting landfills in poor and minority communities throughout the state. Even Wade's home county of Guilford declined to reopen its White Street landfill because of social justice reasons. It's particularly disturbing to see this level of hypocrisy, which violates our most basic principle of humanity, the Golden Rule.

SB328 eliminates monies for monitoring and maintenance of runoff and groundwater contamination from landfill leachate, CO2 and methane, and removes protections that prevent landfills from being put near environmentally sensitive areas or in low-income minority communities that rely on well water and can't afford lawyers or expensive political advocacy. It's based on a faulty premise about landfill capacity from the powerful waste industry lobby. The industry says we have 10 to 15 years of available capacity. Regulators, who permit landfills, suggest it's more like 30 years.

The saddest part is that at a time when the state desperately needs jobs and economic development, our legislators fall back on landfills, opening the door to destroy thousands of acres of rural land and turning North Carolina into America's dumping ground. We are missing the opportunity to join other states in seeking innovative ways to handle waste, including industrial energy-from-waste technology. Such technologies offer a 10-acre solution that brings real jobs, clean energy and substantially reduced contamination from land-filling municipal solid waste.

Guilford County neighbors and others across the state need to send a message to legislators that no candidate, left or right, who supports landfill expansion will be supported. Insist that economic development be a win-win for our environment and say that no policy that dumps on poor, rural North Carolina communities will be tolerated.

Nick Davis and Bonnie Hauser are members of Orange County Voice, a rural advocacy group that's actively seeking alternatives to landfills sited in rural communities.