Ingram charges Helms opposed PCB control bill

By A.L. MAY
Staff Writer

Democratic Senate nominee John R. Ingram criticized his opponent, Republican Sen. Jesse A. Helms, Tuesday for voting against a 1976 bill that Ingram said was designed to protect against illegal dumping of PCBs.

North Carolina officials are investigating several dumpings of the toxic chemical along state roads.

Helms said in an interview that Ingram was trying to build a "straw man." He denied that his vote against the Toxic Substances Control Act was related to the PCB spills.

"I guess I'm a bad fellow, but bless John's heart, I guess he has to say something," Helms said. "But the fact of the matter is that the spills occurred with the new law in force



Jesse A. Helms
'straw man'



John R. Ingram
'special interests'

and when they catch who did it, there are going to be a number of lawsuits to make them pay for it."

Speaking at a press conference, Ingram said Helms's opposition to the law showed Helms "would rather vote with the big out-of-state chemical special interests than protect the citizens of North Carolina."

Ingram said Helms was among six members in the Senate who voted against the bill, which was supported by 70 senators.

Helms said he opposed the bill because it would have meant an increase in federal bureaucracy and regulation of business. He said the law would ultimately cost consumers between $100 million and [illegible] billion because of the regulation.

Voicing his support for the law, Ingram said, "Penalties provided by this act are for the protection against catastrophic dumpings of hazardous chemicals endangering the lives of our people."

Ingram was late for the press conference and several reporters had left before he arrived. Ingram was visibly shaken by the weekend, Gov. Dunn, [illegible]

The News and Observer, Raleigh, N. C.
Wednesday, August 23, 1978

Officials irk Hunt with PCB response

From Yesterday's Late Editions

By RICK NICHOLS
Staff Writer

Publicly, Gov. James B. Hunt Jr. has backed state health bureaucrats who took a stand-offish approach to alerting or examining victims of toxic chemical spills early this month.

"I think we made an adequate response here," he said, faintly praising the officials at his weekly press conference last week.

But administration insiders acknowledged Monday that the governor has been decidedly unhappy at the slow pace of Health Director Jacob Koomen's response to the incidents and irritated by the low profile his public health agency adopted.

"They don't get up and do anything," complained a Hunt adviser. "They take a pot-pot-on-the-head approach."

Although rural Johnston County residents developed weakening, nausea, diarrhea, dizziness and cramps shortly after the PCB-laced spills were discovered, state epidemiologist Martin P. Hines — who acted as Koomen's spokesman — insisted that no significant health hazard existed.

A week later, Hines maintained that a health survey of spill areas was unnecessary.

Hunt announced last Thursday that [illegible] PCB hazards [illegible] stock and people would be hand-delivered to all exposed residents.

Hines is awaiting results of a batch of blood tests he decided to make after Hunt became involved in the situation.

"If there wasn't a health problem," said one source, "there sure was a public information problem."

On Monday, Koomen defended his Division of Health Services, which is also helping find sites for disposing of the PCB-contaminated soil that will be scraped from 270 miles of North Carolina roadsides.

The division is part of the Department of Human Resources.

"I have superior subordinates," Koomen said in a telephone interview. "Martin Hines is among the most-honored epidemiologists in the land."

A 18-year veteran in the top health job, Koomen earns more than $40,000 a year overseeing an agency responsible for disease control, occupational health, health screening and sanitary engineering.

But "public health is passive in North Carolina," said a source close to Hunt. "It's Koomen's idea of omission that we stacking up. A health director should be out there in the lead on things like this."

Koomen, 68, is a graduate of the University of Rochester (N.Y.) School of Medicine and has published a number of articles in the field of epidemiology, the science of public disease control.

"We have a long-established machinery for dealing with different kinds of spills," he said. "We first of all wanted to insure that there was no public panic."

Koomen said he has heard nothing but "thanks and praise" from the governor's office. "Of course, that's my own interpretation," he added.

Meanwhile, a Raleigh geologist, Harry E. LeGrand, suggested that North Carolina "just hasn't planned ahead" to locate environmentally acceptable burial grounds for toxic wastes.

LeGrand last year developed a numerical rating system to determine suitable sites for toxic waste disposal under a contract with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Marshall Staton, chief sanitary engineer in Koomen's division, said Monday, though, that he thought private industry, rather than the state, should take the initiative for hazardous waste disposal.

"I don't know of any inventory of sites that we've ever had in the past," he said, "but I'd hope that private industry could be induced to open this sort of facility for all types of dangerous wastes."

Since the PCB spills, state engineers and property officers have been trying to find sites where soil with low levels of contamination can be buried.

There are no North Carolina landfills designated for hazardous waste disposal, according to State Property Officer J. K. Sherrow.

The closest federally approved site is in Livingston, Ala.

MONS 011393