

## **Canton Repository Editorial**

### **Does EPA believe in mission to protect?**

**Monday, July 22, 2002**

Environmental Protection Agency national ombudsman Robert Martin was stripped of his responsibilities and authority a little bit at a time until finally he was transferred and lost his independence entirely earlier this year.

Two reports on the agency issued last week leave us continuing to wonder whether the EPA really believes in its mission to protect public health and the environment.

One of the biggest hits Martin took as his office was dismantled was losing his chief investigator, Hugh Kaufman. The two men made up the extent of the office, give or take a few part-time interns, and investigated the EPA's performance at dozens of hazardous waste sites, including the Industrial Excess Landfill in Lake Township. They claim the EPA has targeted them and debilitated the office of ombudsman because, among other things, they had alleged that Administrator Christine Todd Whitman exercised undue influence over cleanup decisions at sites where her husband had a collective \$250,000 financial stake.

Martin was transferred to the EPA's Office of Inspector General, which he and others told the Senate last month cannot sustain a fully independent function such as an ombudsman.

The IG's office released its report last week on Martin and Kaufman's claim. This was, remember, an EPA office investigating a charge that the EPA's top boss erred — a charge leveled by a constant thorn in the agency's side who now has the ear of the Senate and the national media because of what he calls the agency's "retaliation" for his doing his job too well.

The inspector general found that Whitman did nothing wrong. That does not offer as much relief as headlines suggested. It was followed by a U.S. Department of Labor report that determined the EPA had no grounds to remove Kaufman from the ombudsman's office; the department ordered Kaufman reinstated in some ombudsman capacity.

It sometimes is difficult to believe that the Environmental Protection Agency truly serves to protect public health and the environment, when embracing independent oversight seems to be such a chore.