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Signifying Nothing?: The Future of Retroactive Liability of the
Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and
Liability Act

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Is the *United States v. Olin* Decision Full of Sound and Fury Signifying Nothing?:
The Future of Retroactive Liability of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act

I. INTRODUCTION

"This land is your land, this land is our land, from California to the New York Island".

Modern hazardous waste statutes have a prodigious reach. For example, selling a bag of dog chow to the wrong client has actually engendered liability under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), a major environmental statute. Despite the obvious absence of a realistic connection between hazardous waste and dog food, a five dollar bag of dog food ultimately cost the seller over three thousand dollars. For this feed business owner, the connection proved all too real.

To be sure, liability emanating from a dog food sale is an oddity transcending even CERCLA's broad liability scheme. Therefore, by way of instruction, this Comment will utilize the following hypothetical, but more common, CERCLA situation. In 1975, Girl Scout Troop 1313 buys

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1. WOODY GUTHRIE, *This Land is Your Land* (Ludlow Music, Inc. 1956).
3. 42 U.S.C. §§ 9601-9675 (1994); see Jack Anderson & Michael Binstein, *Superfund Inadvertently Forces Innocents to Pay*, PORTLAND OREGONIAN, Mar. 7, 1994, at B7, available in 1994 WL 4558097. Russ Zimmer settled with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for $3500 after being named in a hazardous waste lawsuit merely because he accepted third-party checks from a plant that salvaged used batteries. See id. The checks constituted payment for a bag of dog food and a bag of seed. See id.
4. The following example utilizing the fictitious Girl Scout Troop 1313 is, by no
a piece of property from chemical conglomerate Toxluv Corporation, hoping to turn it into a permanent camp site for use by troops in the surrounding area. A few months later troop leaders determine that lack of funding will preclude them from building the campsite. Girl Scout Troop 1313 immediately re-sells the property to a local developer intending to build a business park on the plot. Unbeknownst to the Girl Scout troop leaders, the prior owner, Toxluv, had buried several drums filled with hazardous chemicals on a remote section of the site. Girl Scout Troop 1313 never discovered the existence of the barrels during their brief, transient ownership of the site.

A few years later in 1980, Congress enacts CERCLA, vowing to clean up the calamitous hazardous waste problem nationwide. CERCLA defines four distinct classes of liable parties, otherwise known as potentially responsible parties (PRPs), and courts unanimously find that the statutory scheme applies retroactively. As a result, once a party is defined as a PRP it is potentially liable for any acts or omissions committed prior to the CERCLA's enactment. The innocuous Troop 1313, who committed no "act" other than transitory ownership of this site, will be classified as a PRP. Moreover, because CERCLA simply requires a "release or substantial threat of release" to trigger liability, the Girl Scout troop could be means, an uncommon one. See Anderson & Binstein, supra note 3, at B7; John J. Lyons, Comment, Deep Pockets and CERCLA: Should Superfund Liability Be Abolished?, 6 STAN. ENVTL. L.J. 271, 308 n.172 (1987) (noting a case which held that an owner of property for one hour could be held liable as a matter of law) (citing United States v. Carolawn Co., 21 Env't Rep. Cas. (BNA) 2124, 2128 (1991)).

The terms CERCLA and Superfund will be used interchangeably throughout this discussion.

6. CERCLA classifies four categories of potential defendants: (1) current owners and operators of hazardous waste disposal facilities; (2) past owners and operators; (3) generators of hazardous waste; and (4) transporters of hazardous waste. See 42 U.S.C. § 9607(a)(1)-(4) (1994).


8. See 42 U.S.C. § 9607(a). Girl Scout Troop 1313 would be classified as a "past owner" PRP. See id. § 9607(a)(2); see infra note 65 and accompanying text.

9. See 42 U.S.C. § 9604(a)(1). CERCLA defines a release very liberally to include "spilling, leaking . . . emptying, discharging, . . . escaping, leaching." See id. § 9601(22). "Disposal may occur without any volitional human participation. All that is required is that the hazardous substance has been released into the environment at some point during a party's control of the facility." HRW Sys., Inc. v. Washington Gas Light Co., 823 F. Supp. 318, 339 (D. Md. 1993) (citing Nurad, Inc. v. William E. Hooper & Sons Co., 966 F.2d 837 (4th Cir. 1992) (citations omitted); see also New York v. Shore Realty Corp., 759 F.2d 1032, 1045 (2d Cir. 1985) (holding that "leaking tanks and pipelines, the continuing leaching and seepage from the earlier spills, and the leaking drums" were all releases and that defendant's inexpert handling of the hazardous waste was a threat of release).
liable for millions of dollars in site cleanup costs resulting from their brief term of ownership. Despite its barely-traceable involvement with the site and lack of knowledge regarding any waste disposal committed by prior owner ToxLuv, the troop will be drawn into a lawsuit or forced to settle—either option costing them sums of money well beyond their causal culpability. Moreover, the Girl Scout troop in 1975 had no way of foreseeing its post-1980 CERCLA liability and thus no opportunity to spread or otherwise internalize the costs.  

10. CERCLA specifically defines and limits possible defenses. See Michael P. Healy, Direct Liability For Hazardous Substance Cleanups Under CERCLA: A Comprehensive Approach, 42 CASE W. RES. L. REV. 65, 96-99 (1992) (analyzing the available defenses and commenting that their limited natures reflect congressional intent to give CERCLA wide-ranging liability). The statute promulgates three available defenses: "(1) an act of God; (2) an act of war; (3) an act or omission of a third party other than an employee or agent of the defendant." See 42 U.S.C. § 9607(b). While the third enumerated defense would seem to be the only practical defense to liability, it asks a great deal and places significant constraints on those defendants who would claim it. For a discussion of this so-called "innocent landowner" defense, see Joseph R. Dancy & Victoria A. Dancy, Oil and Gas Issues Involved in CERCLA Reauthorization, 27 ST. MARY'S L.J. 103, 109 & nn.24-26 (1995). In interpreting language regarding the requisite inquiry a third party must make the courts have applied the standards "in effect at the time of the purchase." See HRW Systems, 823 F. Supp. at 348 (adding that it is a "question of what the [purchaser] knew"). In the scenario offered by this Comment, the Girl Scouts will be held to the standards of inquiry of 1975 with particular weight given to any knowledge that may have caused them to make an inquiry, particularly given the fact they were purchasing from a chemical company. See id. But see George Van Cleve, Would the Superfund Response Cost Allocation Procedures Considered by the 103D Congress Reduce Transaction Costs?, 25 Envtl. L. Rep. (Envtl. L. Inst.) 10134 (March 1995), available in WESTLAW, 25 ELR 10134 (asserting that intermediate landowners who purchase after 1980 and contribute no contamination could be considered not liable or be allocated a part of liability depending upon the federal circuit in which the case is heard). 

11. The mere act of being named a PRP triggers considerable transaction costs. See Van Cleve, supra note 10, at 10134 nn.4-7 (analyzing the debilitating Superfund transaction costs); see also William N. Hedeman et al., Superfund Transaction Costs: A Critical Perspective On The Superfund Liability Scheme, 21 Envtl. L. Rep. (Envtl. L. Inst.) 10413 (July 1991), available in WESTLAW, 21 ELR 10413 (asserting that the substantial transaction costs are innate to CERCLA's liability scheme and thus unavoidably provide serious obstacles to CERCLA site cleanup success); Lyons, supra note 4, at 271-72 (commenting on the overwhelming transaction costs of CERCLA and the ways in which it hinders cleanups). 

12. The concept of internalizing costs theorizes that a polluter must bear the weight of the true cost of his actions, otherwise he will exercise little or no care in handling the hazardous wastes. See Michael J. Gergen, The Failed Promise of the "Polluter Pays" Principle: An Economic Analysis of Landowner Liability for Hazard-
Despite its attenuated nexus to the hazardous waste disposal, Girl Scout Troop 1313 faces staggering liability costs resulting from CERCLA's potent triumvirate of strict liability, joint and several liability, and retroactive liability. Additionally, the frequent presence of so-called "orphan shares"—PRPs who have declared bankruptcy or otherwise cannot pay—compounds the liability burden. Thus, because
CERCLA is retroactive, it draws many more PRPs within the scope of the orphan share effect, the inequitable impact of CERCLA stems from this cumulative effect of the liabilities. The foregoing scenario, while fictional in this instance, is nightmarishly real for the thousands of parties, like Troop 1313, who somehow find their names attached to a waste site.

Because multitudes of Troop 1313s exist, a host of reformers from all levels of government and law urge major restructuring of CERCLA.
While some support for maintaining the status quo exists, the more pervasive notion holds that CERCLA falls woefully short of its original and most fundamental charge—to clean up hazardous waste sites across the country—and ushers in a new urgency for the statute's reform. Instead of marshaling and funding cleanups, CERCLA has left a bitter trail of broken promises and bankrupt Troop 1313s. Many tab CERCLA's retroactivity as a primary cause of this disappointment. Following several

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20. The site remediation pace shows some signs of quickening; the EPA recently announced that it has cleaned up its 400th site since the statute's enactment. See EPA Is Making Progress on Speeding Up Superfund Cleanups, WEST'S LEGAL NEWS, October 17, 1996, available in 1996 WL 592354. Tellingly, over 75% of the worst toxic sites on the National Priorities List (NPL) await clean up. See id. Moreover, the cleanup cost has reached the $20 billion plateau and still rises, unimpeded. See Dancy & Dancy, supra note 10, at 105 n.7. Perhaps the most troubling fact is that new dump sites continue to emerge; some estimate that the eventual number of sites needing cleanup will exceed 10,000 and will cost up to $120 billion. See id. (citing Dennis Wamsted, CBO Study Sees Costly Future for Superfund, ENV'T WK., Feb. 3, 1994, at 1, 12).

21. In one case, a limited partnership had spent $1.2 million on a project and then was compelled to declare bankruptcy following the discovery that the development land it had purchased was contaminated. See NL Indus., Inc. v. Kaplan, 792 F.2d 896, 897 (9th Cir. 1986).

uninterrupted years of retroactive application, a 1996 Alabama District Court in *United States v. Olin Corp.*, became the first court to hold that CERCLA should not apply retroactively. In addition, several congressional leaders have recently conditioned CERCLA reauthorization on the elimination of the retroactive element of CERCLA’s liability scheme. As criticism of CERCLA mounts, retroactivity draws much fire. Given the atmosphere of reform already hovering in the air, these recent developments warrant a renewed look at the viability and fairness of CERCLA retroactivity. *Olin*’s reversal on appeal does not minimize the underlying CERCLA policy debate which continues to be waged, and *Olin* continues to be a lightning rod for discussion of CERCLA retroactivity. This Comment will further that discussion by addressing whether

(claiming that through its retroactive impact “CERCLA ensures that those parties [who were responsible and profited] ultimately bear the full cost of their activities”). Amy Blaymore, Comment, *Article and Comment: Retroactive Application of Superfund: Can Old Dogs Be Taught New Tricks?*, 12 B.C. ENVTL. AFF. L. REV. 1, 3,36 (1985) (concluding that CERCLA retroactive application is constitutional and fundamental to Congress’s desire to clean up waste sites).

23. See *United States v. Olin Corp.*, 927 F. Supp 1502 (S.D. Ala. 1996), rev’d, 107 F.3d 1506 (11th Cir. 1997). In March 1997, *Olin* was overturned on appeal. See *United States v. Olin Corp.*, 107 F.3d 1506 (11th Cir. 1997). Judge Kravitch, writing for the panel, held that contrary to Judge Hand’s lower court ruling, Congress manifested a clear intent for CERCLA to be retroactive and stated that the district court’s ruling was unsoundly based upon the argument that CERCLA was a compromise bill which lacked that intent. See id. at 1514. Judge Kravitch added that the compromise did not turn upon retroactivity and that the legislative history clearly revealed an intent on the part of Congress for CERCLA to reach retroactive conduct. See id.


CERCLA retroactivity should continue and what form it should ultimately adopt.

Section II of this Comment frames the statute in its impetus and legislative history. First, this section traces the congressional actions and social outcry which triggered CERCLA's passage. More particularly, this section measures the congressional intent behind retroactivity, given its central role in any judicial ruling on the question. This section will then examine the early line of court cases which established the retroactive liability. Finally, Section II looks to recent events culminating in the United States v. Olin Corp. decision denying CERCLA retroactivity and its subsequent reversal on appeal. Section III documents the arguments supporting CERCLA retroactivity as imperative to the bill's purpose. Section IV presents the fundamental arguments in opposition to CERCLA retroactive application, focusing on fairness. Section V lays out several viable proposals for CERCLA modification and reform. Section VI concludes that, in order to both remain true to its site clean-up mission and to avoid egregious inequities, CERCLA should adopt a negligence standard for pre-enactment PRPs—thereby applying retroactivity only to culpable parties.

II. BACKGROUND & HISTORY: CERCLA ENACTMENT & CASE HISTORY

A. Legislative History of CERCLA

During the 1970s, a wave of legislation crashed through Congress, forcefully impelled by the public's outrage over environmental damage from toxic wastes. Pre-CERCLA, the two dominant pieces of legislation were the 1972 Clean Water Act (CWA) and the 1976 Resource

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26. See infra notes 34-143 and accompanying text.
27. See infra notes 34-77 and accompanying text.
28. See infra notes 78-97 and accompanying text.
29. See infra notes 98-143 and accompanying text.
30. See infra notes 144-68 and accompanying text.
31. See infra notes 169-214 and accompanying text.
32. See infra notes 215-33 and accompanying text.
33. See infra notes 234-42 and accompanying text.
34. See Healy, supra note 10, at 68-69. The most widely publicized toxic incidents that motivated CERCLA's passage were Love Canal, "Valley of the Drums," and the James River discharges. See id.; see also William D. Evans, Jr., The Chaotic Quality of Superfund Contribution Litigation, WEST'S LEGAL NEWS, Sept. 13, 1996, at 7, available in 1996 WL 516196 ("CERCLA was the product of disturbing media reports in the late 1970s on hazardous waste sites, such as New York State's Love Canal, that focused public attention on the national toxic waste disposal problem."); Organ, supra note 19, at 1046 n.17; Blaymore, supra note 22, at 1.
Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA). RCRA sections 7002 and 7003, in particular, ignited a substantial amount of litigation because they granted the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) authority to sue in order to "restrain persons from contributing to any waste activities which may present an imminent and substantial endangerment to health or the environment." RCRA, a largely prospective statute, proved incapable of meeting the remedial needs of catastrophic environmental events such as Love Canal, the infamous toxic waste disaster of the late 1970s which sparked the public demand for tougher legislation. Sensing danger, Congress quickly responded with the remediably-focused CERCLA to combat past hazardous waste problems which would only later reveal their true toxic natures.

CERCLA's legislative journey is a rough tale incompletely told. Several predecessor bills never reached legislative adulthood; CERCLA it-
self was a compromise bill formulated out of the remains of three previous attempts to deal with the hazardous waste fiascoes. The Congressional debates reveal great stress over several elements of Superfund—most notably its liability scheme. Unfortunately, the actual political machinations and behind-the-scene maneuverings which propelled the bill’s enactment have escaped proper telling; the statute’s legislative history is an abnormally lean one for a major bill. We do know that a “lame duck” Congress, in the waning days of a power shift from the Carter Administration to the Reagan Administration, quickly herded the bill through a narrow opening. Several key Senators, who had objected to prominent aspects of the bill including its latent retroactivity, were suddenly “persuaded” to change their minds and came out in support of the bill. The fairly abrupt philosophical reversals on fundamental issues like retroactivity suggested the determinist mood of these holdout Senators to enact a hazardous waste law in some form, no matter how premature, to meet the emerging crisis.

ed, 50 Bus. Law. 663, 673 (Feb., 1995) (highlighting the bills which preceded CERCLA); Grad, supra note 40, at 1-7 (analyzing the predecessor bills).


44. See infra notes 46-48 and accompanying text; see also United States v. Olin Corp., 927 F. Supp. 1502, 1513 (S.D. Ala. 1996), rev’d, 107 F.3d 1506 (11th Cir. 1997) (commenting that CERCLA’s legislative history is devoid of substance); Development, supra note 22, at 151 (calling CERCLA’s legislative history “unhelpful”); Grad, supra note 40, at 1 (detailing the rushed nature of the bill’s passage).

45. See Ohio v. Georgeoff, 562 F. Supp. 1300, 1310 n.12 (N.D. Ohio 1983); Freeman, supra note 41, at 673; Grad, supra note 40, at 1.

46. See Grad, supra note 40, at 14 (discussing the concerns of Senators Domenici, Bentsen, and Baker about potential retroactivity of the bill).

47. See Freeman, supra note 41, at 673-75. These apparent reversals occurred without the detailed record of the legislative history upon which legal scholars typically rely. See Grad, supra note 40, at 1 (noting debate was limited, rules done away with, and amendments disallowed because of the time pressures and lame duck nature of this Congress).

48. See Freeman, supra note 41, at 676. The letter from Senators Stafford and Randolph which accompanied the bill to the House stated:

That the bill passed at all is a minor wonder. Only the frailest, moment-to-moment coalition enabled it to be brought to the Senate floor and consid-
During the debates over CERCLA, several members of Congress pointedly raised fears about the potency of retroactive liability. Senator Domenici went so far as to openly propose an amendment to limit the scope of CERCLA's retroactivity. Such firm opposition by Domenici and other key Senators boded poorly for CERCLA passage as the last days of that Congress wound down. Several compromise bills were quickly brought to the forefront in the hopes that some type of bill could survive. Unfortunately, "[n]othing resembling the usual open process of congressional debate occurred. All discussions and negotiations took place behind closed doors." Thus, CERCLA analysts and courts are left with a significant void in the bill's legislative history. This vacuum in the record has proved crucial because so much of the bill's liability impact has been left to judicial interpretation, which has proceeded without

49. See Freeman, supra note 41, at 672. Senators Domenici, Bentsen and Baker openly expressed reservations about any CERCLA retroactivity prior to the Bill's enactment. See COMMITTEE PRINT, supra note 42, at 427 ("The issue of applying the new standards retroactively remains a troubling one. While the Committee accepted a Domenici amendment to limit the scope of the retroactivity, the issue remains unresolved."). The Senators also expressed concerns about the enforcement motivations of the Justice Department regarding CERCLA, noting that a Department employee had stated that "government is perfectly prepared to punish the innocent for the sins of the guilty." See id. at 428 (emphasis added). But see Nova Chems., Inc. v. GAF Corp., 945 F. Supp. 1098, 1105 n.12 (E.D. Tenn. 1996) (discounting the Senators' statements because they are "additional views" and thus are "unpersuasive" as support of congressional intent disfavoring retroactivity).

50. See Freeman, supra note 41, at 673 (quoting S. REP. No. 848, at 427 (1981)).

51. See id.

52. See id. at 673-74.

53. Id. at 674. Several have noted the "stealth" character of CERCLA's legislative journey. See United States v. Olin Corp., 927 F. Supp. 1502, 1513-14 (S.D. Ala. 1996), rev'd, 107 F.3d 1506 (11th Cir. 1997); Freeman, supra note 41, at 675-78; Grad, supra note 40, at 1.

54. See supra notes 44-48 and accompanying text; see also Nova, 945 F. Supp. at 1104 n.9 (stating that the journey of the bill through Congress produced "no conference report").
a detailed roadmap of legislative history. Additionally, the bill's final language lacks the sharpness and polish of most bills, fostering much unnecessary ambiguity. The twin effects of an incomplete legislative history and ambiguous bill language has left the courts with a great deal of discretion in interpreting CERCLA retroactivity. So far, courts have foisted retroactivity onto CERCLA application and have unanimously found the necessary legislative history or intent. Judicial analysis has centered on finding the requisite congressional intent. Still, many courts have found "clear intent" on the part of Congress and empowered CERCLA with retroactivity, despite the sparse record on the issue.

55. See Freeman, supra note 41, at 674 ("Neither transcripts of committee hearings or bill mark-ups or any report of these informal gatherings, which might be analogous to a committee or a conference report, issued along with the compromise bill, are available for examination.").

56. See id. Senator Randolph claimed that "backroom negotiators had deliberately created ambiguity and equivocation in the statute by deleting provisions." Id. In fact, Congress apparently intended for the Courts to shoulder the burden of interpreting many elements of CERCLA using common law guidelines. See id.; see also Oswald, supra note 12, at 579 & n.41, 599-600 & n.77 (noting this intent regarding the strict liability aspect which is not explicitly laid out in the statute). Compounding the problem for courts, the bill did not receive the requisite and usual editing attention. See Ohio ex rel. Brown v. Georgeoff, 662 F. Supp. 1300, 1310 n.12 (N.D. Ohio 1983) (noting that CERCLA was "rushed through a lame duck session of Congress, and therefore, might not have received adequate drafting").

57. Congress could have mooted all discussion of retroactive application by inserting an express retroactivity clause, but chose not to do so. See Georgeoff, 562 F. Supp. at 1309 ("It would have been a simple matter for Congress to have included a provision within the Act providing that liability would be imposed retroactively . . . Yet, Congress failed to make this statement.").


60. See Northeastern, 810 F.2d at 733; Georgeoff, 562 F. Supp. at 1310-14. Some courts have found the necessary congressional intent in what has been called a "negative inference." Nova Chems., Inc. v. GAF Corp., 945 F. Supp. 1098, 1103 (E.D. Tenn. 1996); see also Ninth Ave. Remedial Group v. Fiberbond Corp., 946 F. Supp. 651, 655 (N.D. Ind. 1996) (finding that the "negative inference" logic was persuasive as to CERCLA being retroactive). This line of reasoning flows from the fact that Congress expressly excluded retroactive application for natural resource damages under CERCLA. See 42 U.S.C. § 9607(f)(1) (1994) ("There shall be no recovery . . . where such damages and the release of a hazardous substance from which such damages resulted have occurred wholly before December 11, 1980." (emphasis added)). Therefore, this argument asserts that because Congress did not expressly exclude retroactive application for PRP liability that by "negative inference," it intended CERCLA to operate retroactively in this area of liability. See Nova, 946 F. Supp. at 1103.
While not expressly promulgating retroactive liability, CERCLA's statutory language apparently allows for such an interpretation. The Act's preamble, for example, announces that Congress enacted CERCLA for the purpose of cleaning up "inactive hazardous waste disposal sites." Several courts have found in this avowed statutory purpose a designation of congressional intent, arguing that the use of the word "inactive" could only indicate sites damaged prior to CERCLA's 1980 enactment. Somewhat more broadly, courts also have pointed to this preamble as generally indicative of a retroactive statutory scheme because of the remedial tone established by its language.

Going beyond the preamble, the statutory interpretations have focused primarily on the language of 42 U.S.C. § 9607(a), which identifies a PRP as:

(1) the owner and operator of a vessel or a facility,
(2) any person who at the time of disposal of any hazardous substance *owned or operated* any facility at which such hazardous substances were disposed of,
(3) any person who by contract, agreement, or otherwise *arranged* for disposal or treatment, or arranged with a transporter for transport for disposal or treatment, of hazardous substances *owned or possessed* by such person, by any other party or entity, at any facility or incineration vessel *owned or operated* by another party and containing such hazardous substances, and
(4) any person who *accepts or accepted* any hazardous substances for transport to disposal or treatment facilities, incineration vessels or sites *selected* by such person, from which there is a release, or a threatened release which causes the incurrence of response costs, of a hazardous substance, shall be liable. . . .

62. See id. § 9601; see also Georgeoff, 562 F. Supp. at 1311 & n.13 (referencing CERCLA's preamble as support for retroactive application).
64. See Northeastern, 810 F.2d at 732-33; Georgeoff, 562 F. Supp. at 1311.
65. 42 U.S.C. § 9607(a) (emphasis added).
The language that pertains to CERCLA retroactivity is, of course, the noticeable past tense language of several clauses within this liability section. Some courts perceive this past tense language as a manifestation of Congress' intent for retroactivity, while others find the statutory language to be non-determinative on the issue. Certainly, the 96th Congress could have eliminated the judicial guesswork by including an unequivocal statement of retroactive application in the statute. This vacuum has led to dual interpretations of CERCLA's language; some believe that omission of a clause indicates a lack of retroactive intent on the part of Congress, while others maintain that the scheme clearly intends retroactivity and that no retroactivity clause is needed to clarify that purpose. The statute's hurried passage and troubled legislative journey, as a practical matter, suggest that an express retroactivity clause would have precluded passage of any CERCLA-type legislation.

With many of the 1980 congressional concerns resurfacing, CERCLA currently faces a pitched reauthorization battle. CERCLA's tangible problems have intensified and hardened these initial concerns during the intervening seventeen years. In fact, these concerns stretch down

66. See id.
67. See Northeastern, 810 F.2d at 732-33 (finding the "statutory scheme" retroactive). But see Shell Oil Co., 665 F. Supp. at 1073 (finding that congressional intent “cannot be divined” from the verb tenses in § 9607(a)); Georgeoff, 562 F. Supp. at 1311 (finding the past tense language to be non-dispositive).
68. See supra note 57; see also United States v. Olin Corp., 927 F. Supp. 1502, 1515 (S.D. Ala. 1996), rev’d, 107 F.3d 1506 (11th Cir. 1997) (noting “that it would have been a simple matter for Congress to have” expressly included retroactivity in the statute and that Congress was aware “that the issue of retroactivity could arise”).
69. See Georgeoff, 810 F.2d at 733 (stating that “the statutory scheme itself is overwhelmingly remedial and retroactive”).
70. See Freeman, supra note 41, at 676 (quoting a letter from Senators Stafford and Randolph to the House urging them not to alter the Superfund bill in even the most minimal sense).
71. See Ways-Means, supra note 24, at 365. These concerns primarily focus on a grossly inequitable allocation of cleanup costs created by the combination of retroactive and strict liability. See id. Secondary concerns include protection of certain segments, such as lenders, from unnecessary and unfair liability. See id. Overarching all concerns is the worry about footing the bill for the cleanups because, as always, Congress declares that new taxes will not be part of the funding mix. See id.
72. Chief among those problems are the delay in cleanup, the eye-popping costs, and the apparent lack of fairness in some elements of the liability scheme. See Anderson, supra note 2, at 20; Dancy & Dancy, supra note 10, at 105 (stating that “[e]ven though private and public entities have already spent $20 billion on the CERCLA program since its inception, only around ten to twenty percent of the sites designated for cleanup under that program have been remediated”); Healy, supra note 10, at 67 (noting that “estimated hazardous substance cleanup costs rival the costs of bailing out the nation’s savings and loan institutions”).
Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House, where President Clinton has characterized CERCLA as a "disaster." Despite an increasing sense of urgency and the apparent need for action, the reauthorization bills remain bogged down in congressional committees as sparks fly over eliminating retroactivity. Several congressional leaders have called openly for elimination of judicially-entrenched retroactivity. Other members of Congress have decried the shift in the Republican Congress to a stance favoring the polluters, with one Congressman labeling an appropriations bill as the "Ed McMahon Polluter's Clearinghouse Sweepstakes" because it pays the polluters rather than forcing the polluter to pay. The outcome of future elections may ultimately determine the congressional direction of CERCLA retroactivity and materially affect the already fragile balance between economics and the environment.

B. Early Cases Establishing Retroactive Liability: Georgeoff & Its Progeny

Because the statute did not expressly grant CERCLA retroactivity, the courts were soon forced to step into the breach and interpret the statute in this area. The early cases set a tone which remains largely unchanged and was unquestioned until 1996. Some have argued that the
early judicial precedents establishing CERCLA retroactivity have carried too much weight and, to a certain degree, have precluded a more thorough judicial analysis of the issue because a mass of cases have simply relied on the “pathfinder” cases without giving the arguments against retroactivity a full and proper consideration.80

Ohio ex rel. Brown v. Georgeoff, a 1983 CERCLA case, proved to be the influential father of CERCLA retroactivity.81 The Georgeoff court in the Northern District of Ohio, first found that CERCLA liability required retroactive application of the statute.82 While duly noting the general rule disfavoring retroactivity, the court pointed out that two Supreme Court cases have “arguably... changed [this] to a presumption in favor of retroactivity,” and nevertheless held that CERCLA had overcome any presumption against retroactivity.83 To reach this finding, the court first examined the language of the statute and, while they found no “unequivocal statements” indicating a clear intent for retroactivity, they did find “indicia” of congressional intent.84 Next, the court analyzed the legislative history of the bill and discovered congressional intent to make responsible industries pay for waste site cleanup of both active and inactive sites.85 Accordingly, the court concluded that CERCLA retroactive liability was authorized and held that CERCLA could be applied retroactively to conduct prior to 1980.86

The Georgeoff ruling cast a shadow over the CERCLA retroactivity analysis which followed.87 While most cases simply marched into line behind Georgeoff, two cases stand out because they made more than a superficial inquiry into the question and found CERCLA to apply retroactively.88 Northeastern, an Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals case, found the entire “statutory scheme” to be indicative of retroactive intent on the

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80. See Olin, 927 F. Supp. at 1507; see also Government Defends Retroactive Liability in Appeal of District Court’s Olin Decision, BNA Nat’l. Env. Daily, Oct. 8, 1996 (presenting Attorney Michael W. Steinberg’s view that a large body of pre-Landgraf cases “settled for less than clear [congressional] intent”).
82. See id. at 1306 (denying the Department of Justice’s argument that continuing ownership did not require such an application).
83. See id. at 1308 (citing Bradley v. School Bd. of the City of Richmond, 416 U.S. 696 (1974); Thorpe v. Housing Auth. of the City of Durham, 393 U.S. 268 (1969)).
84. See id. at 1309-11.
85. See id.
86. See id. at 1313-14.
part of Congress, while *Shell*, a Colorado District Court case, noted a similar scheme supporting CERCLA retroactivity. A groundswell of cases followed the analysis laid out by these leading cases, with no more than a passing analysis, and further entrenched the judicial view that CERCLA required retroactive application to pre-1980 conduct. *United States v. Olin Corp.*, a 1996 Alabama District Court case, stands apart as the sole decision refusing to apply CERCLA retroactively.

Judicial opinions since *Olin* have not only regarded *Olin* as renegade, but have distanced themselves from its reasoning and continue to invoke the *Georgeoff* logic in maintaining retroactivity. Typical of other jurisdictions, a Pennsylvania District Court openly declared that "we are unpersuaded by a single Alabama District Court case." *Cooper v. Agway*, in holding CERCLA to apply retroactively, added that "[i]t is clear that the expectations and preparations of the parties... have changed because of the Olin case, not because of a change in the law." Most sig-

89. *Northeastern*, 810 F.2d at 732-33.
90. *Shell Oil Co.*, 605 F. Supp. at 1075-76.
significantly, the Eleventh Circuit’s recent reversal of Olin has effectively muzzled this solitary judicial attack on CERCLA retroactivity. Still, the underlying problems with retroactive application endure.

C. United States v. Olin: A Lone Wolf Howling in the Wind?

Judge Hand’s Olin decision controverted an established body of law which undergirded CERCLA retroactivity. To accomplish this, the Alabama District Court borrowed its primary framework from a 1994 Supreme Court decision declining to find retroactivity in a Civil Rights statute. Rather than overturning prior judicial precedent on their own reasoning, and in effect turning their swords upon themselves, Judge Hand went to a higher source, the United States Supreme Court. Piggybacking Landgraf, Olin resurrected the traditional rule against presumptions of retroactivity and found that CERCLA could not withstand those presumptions when applied forcefully.

1. Landgraf Framework

The 1994 Supreme Court holding of Landgraf v. USI Film Products provided the structural framework enabling the Olin court to

of a CERCLA compromise but are still pushing for an overturn of retroactivity. See id. at 3.

96. Some argued that because of its Constitutional foundations, Olin might be upheld. See Powers, supra note 95, at 2. Of course, Olin’s reversal revealed that view to be somewhat hopeful. See United States v. Olin Corp., 107 F.3d 1506 (11th Cir. 1997).

97. See infra Sections III and IV.

98. See Alcan, 1996 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 16358, at *7 (“Although the retroactive effect of CERCLA has been upheld by the vast majority of Courts that have addressed the issue, one recent decision has created a bevy of motion practice throughout the nation.”) (footnote omitted).

99. Olin, 927 F. Supp. at 1508 (citing Landgraf v. USI Film Prods., 511 U.S. 244 (1994)). The fact that the court did not decide Landgraf until 1994 may explain the noticeable omission of any serious attempt by prior courts to question retroactivity. See id. at 1508 (asserting that Landgraf undercuts the justifications used by prior cases finding CERCLA retroactivity).

100. See id. at 1517 (calling pre-Landgraf cases “unreliable”).

101. Landgraf “reaffirm[ed] the traditional presumption against retroactive legislation.” Id. at 1508. In so doing, the Court apparently restored this presumption and called into question other cases which had blurred the rule. See id. at 1508-09.

102. In Landgraf, the plaintiff charged a co-worker with sexual harassment under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which only authorized equitable relief. Landgraf, 511 U.S. at 249. The case was originally dismissed by the District Court. See id. While her appeal pended, the Civil Rights Act of 1991 became law. See id. The Act included a right to recover compensatory and punitive damages. See id. The
ignore the prior findings of CERCLA retroactivity. The Landgraf Court first focused on the traditional presumption against retroactive application of statutes. According to the Court, the initial level of analysis must construe the language of the statute with an eye to this presumption. If the language of the statute fails to unequivocally express retroactivity, then the analysis must turn to an inquiry into congressional intent. According to Landgraf, absent a clear indication of congressional intent, the presumption against statute retroactivity must govern. The Court held that there was no clear congressional intent regarding the particular Civil Rights statute in question. Thus, the heavy traditional presumption against retroactive application of a statute carried the day. In so holding, the Court appeared to rectify past Supreme Court held that the Act did not apply retroactively and that Landgraf could not bring an action for such damages. See id. at 286.

See Olin, 927 F. Supp. at 1511-19. Judge Hand summarized the Court's analysis as follows:

[I]t requires a court 1) to determine a) whether Congress has expressly stated the statute['s reach and b) if not, whether the text and legislative history have "clearly prescribed" Congress' [sic] intent to apply the provision retroactively; 2) if not, to determine whether the provision actually has "retroactive effect on the party or parties in the litigation;" and 3) if so, to apply the traditional presumption against retroactivity—absent a clear congressional intent to the contrary.

Id. at 1511.

See Landgraf, 511 U.S. at 265 ("[T]he presumption against retroactive legislation is deeply rooted in our jurisprudence, and embodies a legal doctrine centuries older than our Republic.") (citing Kaiser Aluminum & Chem. Corp. v. Bonjorno, 494 U.S. 827, 842-44, 855-56 (1990) (Scalia, J., concurring)). Landgraf then highlighted some of the fundamental rationales for such a presumption. The Court first noted fairness. See id. ("[I]ndividuals should have an opportunity to know what the law is and to conform."). Then it mentioned the legitimate expectations of individuals in knowing the law and conforming conduct to it. See id. (citing General Motors Corp. v. Romein, 503 U.S. 172 (1992)). Finally, the Court delineated the concept of creativity in "commercial and artistic endeavors [which] is fostered by a rule of law that gives people confidence about the legal consequences of their actions." Id. at 266.

See id. at 270-73.

See id. at 272, 280.

See id. at 280.

See id. at 285.

See id. ("[W]e have found no clear evidence of Congressional intent that section 102 . . . should apply to cases arising before its enactment."). The Court noted that a prior 1990 version of this civil rights statute had included a retroactivity clause, but it was vetoed by President Clinton primarily because of the clause. See
Court holdings which seemed to call the traditional rule into question and which, according to some interpretations, turned the presumption on its head. In restoring order, the Court laid the groundwork for a court to overrule the retroactivity of other statutes which did not have the concomitant clarity of congressional intent. The *Olin* court soon alighted upon the potential Constitutional weakness of CERCLA retroactivity resulting from the *Landgraf* holding and took advantage of this weakness by denying CERCLA liability for Olin Corporation's actions prior to 1980.

2. *Olin* Analysis

The *Olin* court borrowed the *Landgraf* framework to deny retroactive application of CERCLA. In *Olin*, the parties filed a proposed consent decree concerning Olin's corporate property in Alabama on which a mercury-cell chloralkali plant had released mercury into groundwater until 1974 and a drop-protection chemicals plant had discharged wastewater until 1974. The district court found prior CERCLA retroactivity to be misapplied by the courts in light of *Landgraf*. Specifically, the court

*id.*, at 255-57. The Court added, however, that this fact was not dispositive. *See id.* at 256. After a thorough flushing out of the bill's language and history, the Court concluded that "the history of the 1991 Act conveys the impression that legislators agreed to disagree about whether and to what extent the Act would apply to preenactment conduct." *See id.* at 263. The Court thus perceived that the legislative history evinced no clear intent for retroactivity and that ultimately the default rule disfavoring it would take effect. *See id.* at 265.


111. *See* Freeman, *supra* note 41, at 664 (asserting that after *Landgraf* "it is... clear that eight justices believe there must be a 'clear statement' of congressional intent for a federal statute to be interpreted as applying new liability retroactively"). *But see* James Cable v. Jamestown, 43 F.3d 277 (6th Cir. 1995) (claiming that the Court ruling in *Landgraf* was a "reiteration... not a radical reformulation" of the approach towards retroactivity).

112. United States v. Olin Corp., 927 F. Supp. 1502 (S.D. Ala. 1996), *rev'd*, 107 F.3d 1506 (11th Cir. 1997). Prior to the *Olin* ruling one commentator predicted that if a federal court were to face the issue of Superfund retroactive liability "§ 107(a) could not meet the test of statutory construction set forth in Justice Stevens's majority opinion in *Landgraf*." *See* Freeman, *supra* note 41, at 664.


114. *See id.* at 1504-05.

115. *See id.* at 1519.
transposed the *Landgraf* analytical structure onto CERCLA. In doing so, it determined that CERCLA contained no unequivocal expression of retroactivity, although it did discover non-dispositive "indicia" of such an intent. The court then surveyed the legislative history of the Act and found no clear congressional intent favoring retroactivity. The court concluded by applying the presumption against retroactivity while ignoring the pre-*Landgraf* cases which injected CERCLA with its retroactive power. The court held that CERCLA § 107(a) was "not retroactive."

3. *Olin's Reversal by the Eleventh Circuit*

*Olin*’s “mini-revolution” ended before it reached the streets. In March 1997, the Eleventh Circuit overruled *Olin*; Judge Kravitch, writing for a unanimous Court of Appeals, held that CERCLA supported retroactive application to pre-CERCLA conduct. Contravening the district court, Judge Kravitch asserted that CERCLA met the Commerce Clause

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116. See id. at 1511.
117. See id. at 1513 (quoting Ohio ex rel. Brown v. Georgeoff, 562 F. Supp. 1300, 1311 (N.D. Ohio 1983)).
118. See id. at 1512-19.
119. See id. at 1519.
120. CERCLA § 107(a) identifies the PRPs and provides the controversial past tense language. See supra note 66 and accompanying text.
121. *Olin*, 927 F. Supp. at 1519. Although the court did not need to reach the question, *Olin* also overturned liability on Commerce Clause grounds. See id. at 1533. Utilizing another recent Supreme Court decision, *United States v. Lopez*, 514 U.S. 549 (1995), *Olin* found that the Commerce Clause prohibited Congress from regulating this waste. See id. at 1523. According to *Olin*, *Lopez* required that the statute must itself "regulate economic activity which 'substantially affects' interstate commerce" and that the statute include" a jurisdictional element which would ensure, through case by case inquiry, that the statute affects interstate commerce." See id. at 1532 (quoting *Lopez*, 514 U.S. at 559-60). *Olin* found that CERCLA did not contain the necessary jurisdictional element and moreover, even if it did, that the "activity in question has virtually no effect on interstate commerce." See id. at 1533. Thus, *Olin* held that CERCLA exceeded Congress' Commerce Clause power. See id. Several other courts have strongly disagreed with the *Olin* holding regarding the Commerce Clause. See, e.g., *Nova Chems. Inc. v. GAF Corp.*, 945 F. Supp. 1098 (E.D. Tenn. 1996); *United States v. Alcan Aluminum Corp.*, No. 92-CV-0748 1996 WL 637559 (N.D.N.Y. 1996); *United States v. NL Indus.*, 936 F. Supp. 545 (S.D. Ill. Oct. 28, 1996).
122. See *United States v. Olin Corp.*, 107 F.3d 1506 (11th Cir. 1997).
123. See id. at 1514.
challenge and, more significantly, the retroactivity challenge. Agreeing with the district court that the presumption against retroactivity remained in force, Judge Kravitch still found that CERCLA's language, structure, and legislative history sufficed in the absence of an express retroactivity clause in the statute. The court held that the requisite congressional intent was in place to override the traditional disfavoring of retroactive statutory application.


Olin's reversal by the Eleventh Circuit does not dim the controversy over CERCLA retroactivity; the underlying issues remain. That decision simply halts, for now, the wholesale elimination of retroactivity by the courts. Congress may still reform CERCLA to wholly eradicate retroactivity or dampen its impact on "innocent" PRPs.

Any alteration of CERCLA retroactivity will impact the act's liability scheme more than its clean-up purpose; hazardous waste site remediation and clean-ups will continue to plod forward. The health and safety hazards are clearly too serious and the environmental and human costs are clearly too high to end remediation entirely. Furthermore, eliminating site clean-up and remediation would essentially vaporize the fundamental purpose of CERCLA.

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124. See id. at 1511, 1514.
125. See id. at 1512-14.
126. See id. at 1514.
127. Generally, the courts must decide the whole issue of retroactivity; they cannot "legislate" a middle ground as this Comment proposes with a negligence standard of culpability for pre-enactment PRPs. See infra notes 228-32, 236-41 and accompanying text. Thus, if a court concludes that Congress intended retroactivity, then the court must hold in favor of such a statutory application. See, e.g., id. (finding clear congressional intent for retroactive application of CERCLA).
128. See supra notes 71-77 and accompanying text.
129. Some disagree that any realistic move forward on clean-up has occurred under the retroactive liability scheme anyway. See Lyons, supra note 4, at 272-73 & n.9-10 (arguing that billions of dollars have been wasted on transaction costs in CERCLA litigation which could have been utilized for cleanups). By the mid-1980s, it was estimated that because of immense transaction costs, 400-450 sites on the National Priorities List remained unremediad which otherwise may have been cleaned up. See id. at 272 & n.9 (citing Senate Hearing in Insurance Issues and Superfund: Hearing Before the Senate Comm. on Env't and Pub. Works, 99th Cong., 134 (1985) (statement of John Butler)).
131. See Healy, supra note 10, at 77 (noting "CERCLA's paramount objective of facilitating the cleanup of hazardous waste sites that pose a threat to public health or
The probable impact, then, of wholly or partially eliminating CERCLA retroactivity would be a revenue shortfall.\textsuperscript{132} The revenue lost from pre-1980 PRPs who would no longer be liable must necessarily be found elsewhere.\textsuperscript{133} This revenue burden could default to several groups such as post-1980 PRPs, industry (by way of Superfund taxes), the states, or taxpayers.\textsuperscript{134} Certainly, the cost burden of going forward stands as the
defining issue of the CERCLA world sans retroactivity.\textsuperscript{135}

On the positive side, eliminating retroactive application lowers transaction costs.\textsuperscript{136} Because retroactivity enlarges the pool of PRPs outward in concentric proportions, its elimination would immediately limit the numbers of litigants at any given site.\textsuperscript{137} Narrowing the pool of potential PRPs will materially reduce the revenues upon which Superfund currently draws.\textsuperscript{138}

Scholars and members of Congress have promoted compromise in the form of "carveouts," excluding liability for certain groups of PRPs perceived to be only tenuously responsible for the hazardous waste damage at the particular site.\textsuperscript{139} These carveouts would protect unfairly vulnerable groups such as small businesspersons, innocent transporters of hazardous substances, lenders, and municipalities.\textsuperscript{140} Others have clamored

\textsuperscript{135} This is particularly true because Congress chose to create a far-reaching, inclusive liability scheme which encompassed all who touch a site. In doing so, Congress consciously chose to shift the financial burden of clean-up away from the taxpaying public and onto those potentially culpable parties, the PRPs. See Lyons, \textit{supra} note 4, at 310-11 & n.181. See \textit{generally} Dancy & Dancy, \textit{supra} note 10, at 120-23 (discussing the issue of increased funding for CERCLA were retroactive liability to be eliminated).

\textsuperscript{136} See Daniel Abuhoff et al., \textit{Superfund Reform Now Rests in Hands of GOP}, NAT'L LJ., Dec. 5, 1994, at C10 (noting that CERCLA's liability scheme results in repeated litigation); Shanahan, \textit{supra} note 17, at 5 (arguing that retroactive liability creates an endless cycle of lawsuits).

\textsuperscript{137} One noted Connecticut case included over 1200 third parties before the judge radically pared it down to a manageable number. See B.F. Goodrich v. Murtha, 815 F. Supp. 539 (D. Conn. 1993); see also Mark Mininberg & Katharine S. Goodbody, \textit{The Superfund Crisis in the Federal Courts: A Case Study}, 25 Env't Rep. (BNA) 139 (May 20, 1994). The 1200 parties included Josephine Kriz, whose deceased husband had simply discarded an old couch in a dumpster owned by Harold Murtha, the prime defendant and owner of a waste disposal company. Id. at 140.

\textsuperscript{138} Estimating the Superfund revenue shortfall from the elimination of retroactivity is difficult at best. See Dancy & Dancy, \textit{supra} note 10, at 122-23 & nn.89-90. Some argue that because of "wasted" transaction costs which inevitably result in every CERCLA action, the revenues the EPA receives may not be affected as much as most think. See id. at 123 n.90; Shanahan, \textit{supra} note 17, at 4.

\textsuperscript{139} The EPA, while not favoring carveouts per se, has headed in that direction by setting out policies in favor of settlements for de minimis and de micromis PRPs (small-volume waste contributors). See \textit{CERCLA Settlements With De Micromis Waste Contributors}, 24 Env't Rep. (BNA) 1939 (1994) [hereinafter \textit{CERCLA Settlements}]. CERCLA expressly authorizes such settlements. See 42 U.S.C. § 9622(a)-(m) (1994).

\textsuperscript{140} 142 CONG. REC. H6772-74 (daily ed. June 25, 1996) (letters of Commerce Com-
for a more drastic 50% "retroactivity discount." These exclusions and liability caps would likely result in large corporations with the historical "deep pockets" shouldering the bulk of the cost. Ultimately, Congress must re-formulate the retroactivity rules in the brave new CERCLA world or the courts will be forced to step into the void once again.

III. THE CONTROVERSY REVISITED: ARGUMENTS FAVORING RETROACTIVITY

CERCLA retroactivity supporters arduously defend the statute along several lines. First, they point to the statute's role in stemming environmental disasters. Second, they argue that the polluter must pay for his act, regardless of when he committed it or how legal it was at the time. Third, the supporters claim that eliminating retroactivity will...
severely hamstring the necessary funding for site clean-ups. Lastly, they assert that Congress intended CERCLA to be retroactive.

A. Environmental Degradation

Certainly, eliminating CERCLA retroactivity may impair the unfinished cleanup of waste sites across the country. Many of the serious problem sites remain unremediated; at least one study estimates that only 237 of the 1292 worst sites have been cleaned up. Apparently, a great deal of the damage occurred at sites prior to 1980. While this has not been adequately proven, statistical data warrants caution about eliminating all retroactive application because so much of the site damage was carried out prior to CERCLA's enactment. Proponents of retroactivity maintain that its elimination would contradict CERCLA's intended purpose to remediate waste sites through the "polluter pays" vehicle. Moreover,

147. See infra notes 158-63 and accompanying text.
148. See infra notes 164-67 and accompanying text.
149. See Dancy & Dancy, supra note 10, at 105 n.7 (citing Shanahan, supra note 17).
150. See Gergen, supra note 12, at 689 n.203 (claiming that 27% of the National Priorities List (NPL) sites received contamination from their current owners and operators exclusively, while noting that it is unclear whether the other 73% of sites were primarily contaminated by their current owners alone); Lyons, supra note 4, at 301 & n.145 (stating that by the late 1970s the yearly amount of hazardous waste generated in the United States was around 80 billion pounds) (citing S. EPSTEIN ET AL., HAZARDOUS WASTE IN AMERICA 7 (1982)) (emphasis added). More tragically for those who have been harmed is the fact that the serious danger of the hazardous waste threat was not fully comprehended until it was far too late. See Lyons, supra note 4, at 278 & n.27 (noting that uncertainty about the dangers of trace elements of a hazardous waste are particularly troublesome).
151. See Lyons, supra note 4, at 278. On the other side, many assert that retroactive application of CERCLA has only contributed to unconscionable delays and bungled clean-up jobs. See Hedeman, supra note 11, at 17-18 (citing the Sasser Report which found that only 4% of NPL sites had been cleaned up by 1990). For example, the site ranked number one on the NPL and remained on the list for eight years before material work began on the site. See id.
152. See Current Owners, supra note 132. There is a great deal of contention over whether the "polluter pays" concept of CERCLA fundamentally works to clean up sites. In fact, many advocate the position that the current CERCLA liability scheme serves only to delay cleanups rather than accomplish them. See Hedeman, supra note 11, at 3. Critics contend that the liability scheme, because it fosters so much litigation, only serves to inhibit the necessary environmental remediation of the sites and that it will require a great deal of streamlining in order to bring the statute in line with its purpose. See id. at 17 & n.75 (referring to a Rand report finding that an average site cleanup under the current scheme does not begin, on average, until eight years after EPA learns of the problem). More critically, according to the Sasser Report, only 4% of sites on the NPL have been remediated. See id. (citing The Sasser
the fear exists that any site left untouched could, over time, become another Love Canal, and that eliminating retroactive liability altogether could produce such a bitter result. While retroactive liability is not a panacea, it is medicine that, at the very least, halts the onset of further diseased waste sites.

B. Who Will Pay for Cleanup: Making the Polluter Pay

CERCLA retroactivity directly provides a sizeable part of the substantial remediation and clean-up tab needed for waste sites across the country. CERCLA's avowed purpose is to make the polluter pay. This intent was largely derived from the belief that, as between innocent taxpayers and "guilty" polluters who benefited from their harmful behavior, it was the polluters who should bear the economic responsibility for their acts, regardless of whether the acts were legal at the time. Proponents argue that ending CERCLA retroactivity will unfairly shift the revenue burden to present owners or taxpayers alone. Without reve-
nue there is no cleanup; the very existence of the Superfund shows the critical nature of cost in enacting environmental change.\textsuperscript{159}

\textbf{C. CERCLA Revenue Problems}

The CERCLA reauthorization battles in the 105th Congress reveal the scope of the revenue concerns in the face of potential retroactivity elimination.\textsuperscript{160} In June 1996, a Republican-led Congress attempted to pass a Superfund revenue bill piggybacked on an appropriations bill for Veterans Affairs.\textsuperscript{161} Democrats charged that the appropriation would include rebates to polluters for past payments and thus “pay the polluter,” flaunting CERCLA’s purpose.\textsuperscript{162} Beyond such “rebate” attempts, leaders in both political parties have pledged their determination not to increase taxes to fill a CERCLA funding shortfall created by the elimination of retroactive liability.\textsuperscript{163} Thus, ending CERCLA retroactivity will fundamentally alter the economic landscape of waste site cleanup.\textsuperscript{164}

\textsuperscript{159} Estimates of the average cost to clean up a single site range between $20 million and $50 million. See Gergen, \textit{supra} note 12, at 628 n.16. The Congressional Budget Office has estimated that 2300 to 10,100 future sites still need to be cleaned up at a present cost of $42 billion to $120 billion. See Wamsted, \textit{supra} note 20, at 12. As of 1994, $10.8 billion Superfund dollars had been spent. See Shanahan, \textit{supra} note 17, at 2.

\textsuperscript{160} CERCLA was set to expire Dec. 31, 1995. See \textit{House Committee Leaders, supra} note 25. The arguments over an extension of CERCLA funding proved to be acerbic. See 142 \textit{Cong. Rec.} H6770-H6779 (daily ed. June 25, 1996).


\textsuperscript{163} See Dancy & Dancy, \textit{supra} note 10, at 123 n.90; \textit{House Committee Leaders, supra} note 25.

\textsuperscript{164} For example, states may be required to fund a materially higher percentage of clean-ups than they currently do. See Dancy & Dancy, \textit{supra} note 10, at 121-22 (stating that states currently fund less than 1\% of total cleanup costs under CERCLA).
D. CERCLA Has the Requisite Congressional Intent to Apply Retroactively

Contrary to its detractors, retroactivity supporters find open declarations of intent in the sparse legislative history of the statute, the statutory language, and the scheme of the statute. In fact, while the legislative history is relatively limited, there are some fairly significant indications that CERCLA should have retroactive application. Moreover, supporters say, the statute indicates a retroactive intent in its language, particularly in its past tense usage. On balance, they argue that enough momentum exists to override any presumption against retroactive application of the statute.

IV. THE CONTROVERSY REVISITED: ARGUMENTS RENOUNCING RETROACTIVITY

CERCLA retroactivity detractors, who rail against its egregious effects, attack with an increased enthusiasm now that one court has sided with them. As the fundamental prongs of their attack, opponents of

165. See, e.g., United States v. Northeastern Pharm. & Chem. Co., 810 F.2d 726, 732-33 (8th Cir. 1986). But see Landgraf v. USI Film Prods., 511 U.S. 244, 285-86 (1994) (noting the justification that "retroactive application of a new statute would vindicate its purpose more fully" is inadequate to overcome the general presumption against retroactivity).

166. See, e.g., H.R. REP. NO. 96-1016, pt. 1, at 63 (1980), reprinted in 1980 U.S.C.C.A.N. 6119, 6140 (statement of then-Rep. Gore stressing that chemical companies should have known what they were doing and that they benefited from their practices).


169. Representative Michael Oxley (R-Ohio), sponsor of Superfund reform legislation in the House, has said that this case engenders "a whole new ballgame" as far as
CERCLA retroactivity articulate several justifications for its defeat: the specific lack of Constitutional Due Process and general lack of fairness, the costly vagaries of economic uncertainty it produces, and the unfair allocation of cleanup costs due to a potent CERCLA liability scheme of retroactivity, strict liability, and joint and several liability.

A. Due Process

CERCLA's questionable due process elicits the most vehement challenges from the varied opponents of retroactivity. Their overarching argument, based primarily upon the Fifth Amendment, underscores the temporal legality of PRP conduct at the time it occurred, emphasizing that retroactive application of CERCLA to conduct that was legal before 1980 eradicates a PRPs' fundamental due process rights. Moreover, the presence of strict liability and joint and several liability magnifies the problems inherent in the retroactive application of CERCLA, because this retroactivity also necessarily draws a wider web of blameless conduct into a rubber-stamped predetermined liability scheme against which a PRP has no defense.

170. One commentator has called CERCLA's liability structure an "octopus-like' liability scheme" because of lack of fairness inherent in its powerful reach. See Evans, supra note 34, at 2.

171. See Dancy & Dancy, supra note 10, at 112; Blaymore supra note 22, at 20-36.

172. "No person shall be . . . deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law . . . ." U.S. Const. amend. V. In addition to the Fifth Amendment, some justify elimination of retroactivity on the basis that it is an ex post facto law and, as such, is unconstitutional. See Shanahan, supra note 17, at 4. The Constitution states that "No . . . ex post facto Law shall be passed." U.S. Const. art. I, § 9, cl.3. An ex post facto law punishes an act which was innocent at the time it was performed. See Shanahan, supra note 17, at 4. But see Blaymore, supra note 22, at 46-49 (underscoring the concept that the ex post facto doctrine applies to criminal laws) (citing Calder v. Bull, 3 U.S. (3 Dall.) 386 (1798) (emphasis added). Of course, the doctrine could apply if CERCLA was deemed a criminal statute. See id.

173. See Landgraf v. USI Film Prods., 511 U.S. 244, 266 (1994) (noting that the "Due Process Clause also protects interests in fair notice and repose that may be compromised by retroactive legislation . . . ."); see also Dancy & Dancy, supra note 10, at 111-12 (claiming that acts "perfectly legal and in conformity with industry custom" at the time are now causing liability); Hedeman, supra note 11, at 4 (stating that liability occurs even though the acts were lawful at the time); Blaymore, supra note 22, at 20 (noting the due process claims of those who performed legal acts now being found liable); Lyons, supra note 4, at 291-93 (lamenting the fact that those who properly disposed of their waste following current legal guidelines can now be found liable under CERCLA retroactivity).

174. See supra notes 2-12 and accompanying text. Opponents of retroactivity point to the liability of parties like Troop 1313 or the seller of dog food, Russ Zimmer. See
Proponents of retroactivity, while agreeing that due process goes astray, assert that much case law stands for the proposition that, in instances of furthering a "public purpose" or where the legislation rationally spreads costs to those who profited (the so-called "rational means test"), as long as the means are rationally related to its purpose, retroactivity is constitutionally acceptable. Thus, they argue that hazardous waste disposal seminates a significant societal harm whose tremendous cost must be spread out among the evil-doers (those who benefited should pay) and that the resulting due process concerns fail to override the necessary retroactivity of CERCLA. Opponents of retroactivity reply that cost-spreading is irrelevant to past CERCLA violations and that this class of PRPs could not plan or budget for such contingencies because they had no ability to predict that their legal and honest conduct would later create substantial liability.

This cost spreading concept of strict liability loses its attractiveness when applied retroactively because the polluter often had no real choice as to a course of action because he understood his actions at the time to be completely legal. In fact, because they often met the highest dis-

supra notes 2-3 and accompanying text. See also O'Neil v. Picillo, 883 F.2d. 176, 178, 183 (1st Cir. 1989) (holding liable for $1.4 million dollars a party who was responsible for only a trace of the contamination).

175. Nachman Corp. v. Pension Benefit Guar. Corp., 592 F.2d 947, 958 (7th Cir. 1979). Nachman concerned the constitutionality of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) requiring employers to provide pension benefits to workers who had terminated employment in the year immediately preceding its passage. See id. at 950.

176. See Usery v. Turner Elkhorn Mining Co., 428 U.S. 1, 18 (1976) (creating the rational means test to measure retroactivity against the loss of due process). In Usery the Court upheld a statute which imposed liability on the coal industry to compensate former employees harmed by black lung disease. See id. at 19-20.

177. See United States v. Northeastern Pharm. & Chem. Co., 810 F.2d 726, 733-34 (N.D. Ohio 1983) ("Congress acted in a rational manner in imposing liability for the cost of cleaning up such sites upon those parties who created and profited from the sites and upon the chemical industry as a whole.") (citation omitted).

178. See infra notes 204-05 and accompanying text. The general concept is the tort concept of strict liability, that whoever gains from their conduct should also shoulder the costs to society of their behavior. See Oswald, supra note 12, at 598 n.52.

179. See Anderson, supra note 2, at 35 (noting retroactive liability is "difficult to pass forward to consumers and is difficult to avoid by altering behavior or eliminating risk-producing inputs"); see also Schwarz, supra note 12, at 825 (claiming that retroactive liability will not promote risk-spreading). But see Healy, supra note 10, at 81-86 (retroactive liability may, in fact, impact and deter future behavior because "the
posal standards at the time, the polluter was spreading the costs in the best manner available. In addition, a related cost-spreading issue reveals some poignant irony: because of a massive hazardous waste insurance void, post-1980 PRPs drawn into the CERCLA liability scheme at any given site cannot spread the costs through insurance and pay for the retroactively liable insolvent or unavailable PRPs for whom that same insurance was readily available. Thus, retroactive application of CERCLA undercuts both the strict liability cost-spreading rationale and insurance availability to present owners of hazardous waste sites—a particularly unfortunate result for those who never benefited from ownership of the land in question.

Compounding the inequities of CERCLA retroactivity is the scientific inadequacy of the pre-CERCLA cleanup conduct; many polluters were only following the scientific protocol, as archaic as it may now seem, at the time. These polluters argue, with considerable justification, that their actions fell within the standard of care required at the time. In fact, many waste disposers utilized "cutting edge" practices. Gover-
ment officials often permitted, and even encouraged, a multitude of pre-
1980 disposal efforts. Now, these same law abiders have become law
breakers; the science they relied upon has spurned them.

B. Inequitable Allocation of Costs

The unfair allocation of cleanup costs among PRPs elicits measured
and harsh responses from opponents of retroactivity. In theory,
CERCLA intends to make the polluter pay while allocating the liability to
those parties who most benefited from the use of the site. Yet, the
potency of the CERCLA liability scheme repeatedly holds parties with
barely traceable connections to the waste site (such as Troop 1313) fi-
nancially responsible for cleanup. Moreover, CERCLA’s liability
scheme has a unique equilibrium: it similarly attacks the deep pocket
offenders, who repeatedly pay more than their fair share of liability sim-
ply because they are able to. Both ends of the liability spectrum—the
“deep pocket” corporate PRP and the smaller “empty pocket” party with
barely traceable links to the site—suffer from the frequent presence of

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186. See Anderson, supra note 2, at 26 n.117 (giving examples of situations where
government officials expressly okayed disposal techniques) (citing Joel A. Tarr, His-
torical Perspectives on Hazardous Wastes in the United States, 3 WASTE MGMT. &
Res. 95, 99 (1985)).

187. Extreme examples include corporate officers who followed appropriate scientif-
cal guidelines at the time they directed disposal, yet who suddenly find themselves
personally liable for their honest and legal actions. See Oesterle, supra note 22, at 67
n.27.

188. See Anderson supra note 2, at 6-7; Dancy & Dancy, supra note 10, at 116-18.

189. See Anderson, supra note 2, at 7 (“The idea behind the CERCLA liability sys-
tem is deceptively simple: make the polluter pay.”).

190. 132 CONG. REC. E132743 (daily ed. April 23, 1986) (stating that those liable
“can be held responsible for full costs even if what it did was totally without fault
and had only the most trivial consequences”) (quoting Robert D. Kilpatrick,
1985); see Anderson, supra note 2, at 6, 8, 19 (noting that “costs are often borne by
those who are not responsible for problem at all” and adding that CERCLA has be-
come a “Liability Lottery”); Dancy & Dancy, supra note 10, at 116 (commenting that
retroactivity does not influence PRP acts because they have already occurred).

191. See Gergen, supra note 12, at 673, 676 (claiming that PRPs with the financial
foundations should be ready to confront claims because the less financially capable
parties are not as attractive); Van Cleve, supra note 10, at 2 n.13 (asserting that the
EPA strategically targets the few “deep pockets”).
the “orphan share.” These orphan shares hinder equitable cleanups because they often represent the most culpable party, yet will not have to shoulder any of the liability and their cost share gets consumed by other, often less culpable, parties.

Clearly, Congress was aware of these dangerous allocation inequities from the beginning. Then-Representative Albert Gore, Jr. proposed what have become known as the “Gore Factors” for courts to weigh when adjudicating liability allocation for a given site. As the original enactment date of CERCLA fades, its inequitable allocation of liability draws increased focus. For example, in recent years the EPA has moved noticeably towards excluding the smaller parties (de minimis and de micromis) from the liability maelstrom. Other attempts to streamline the litigation process have included the use of non-binding allocations of responsibility (NBARs), covenants not to sue, settlements with de minimis and de micromis parties, and model consent decrees.

192. The liability deepens with the existence of “orphan shares”—the shares of parties who have gone bankrupt, become insolvent or in some other way are unable to pay cleanup costs. See Evans, supra note 16 and accompanying text.

193. See Evans, supra note 16; see also Anderson supra note 2, at 23-24 (arguing that orphan share allocation may not be fair); Tucker, supra note 25, at C1.

194. The six Gore Factors are as follows: (1) the ability of the parties to distinguish their contribution; (2) the amount of the hazardous waste; (3) the degree of toxicity; (4) the degree of the parties’ involvement in generation, transportation, treatment, storage, or disposal; (5) the degree of care; and (6) the degree of cooperation with federal and state officials. See 126 Cong. Rec. 26,781 (1980); see also Development, supra note 22, at 1533-34 (discussing the Gore Factors and their applicability). Gore’s factors were not adopted by Congress in CERCLA, but a House Judiciary Report posited that they would be fair guidelines for allocating costs in contribution actions. See H.R. Rep. No. 99-253(iii) (1985), reprinted in 1986 U.S.C.C.A.N. 3038, 3042. CERCLA provides that “in resolving contribution claims, the court may allocate response costs among liable parties using such equitable factors as the court determines are appropriate.” 42 U.S.C. § 9613(f)(1) (1994). Courts have frequently utilized the Gore Factors in their Superfund allocation decisions. See, e.g., United States v. A & F Materials Co., Inc., 578 F. Supp. 1249, 1256 (S.D. Ill. 1984). Often the poorly kept or missing records make liability shares difficult to determine, or commingled waste makes it fruitless to determine the level of harm caused by each PRP. See Anderson, supra note 2, at 24; Organ, supra note 19, at nn.27, 80.

195. See Van Cleve, supra note 10 (discussing the congressional debate over Superfund reauthorization and the proposed bill’s attempts to improve the process).

196. De minimis parties are small volume waste contributors to a given site. SARA expressly allowed for de minimis settlements (early settlements with the minimal PRPs at a hazardous waste site). See 42 U.S.C. § 9622(g) (1994). De micromis parties are extremely small contributors of waste. The EPA has set up guidelines for settling with these minimal contributors in order to facilitate cleanups. See CERCLA Settlements, supra note 139. De micromis settlements are open only to generators and transporters—not to site owners or operators. Id.

197. See 42 U.S.C. § 9622(d), (e)(3), (f), (g) (1994). See generally Hedeman, supra
these recent moves to minimize the liability scheme's inequities, the CERCLA allocation system continues, in an unfair manner, to economically shackle many PRPs while failing in its statutory mandate to hasten and fund hazardous site clean-ups. Superfund retroactivity enables this dangerous inequity because it engenders a liability potency nearly impossible for the innocent to fully elude. As a practical matter, CERCLA's retroactive application creates serious evidentiary problems; in particular, disposal records are often lost, incomplete or missing. Furthermore, retroactivity, in its very nature, creates situations in which potential PRPs from the past are dead or insolvent. Thus, those truly innocent or minimally culpable of hazardous waste disposal have almost no available evidentiary defense.

C. Ability to Internalize & Spread the Costs: Budget & Insurance Issues

Opponents of CERCLA retroactivity further argue that it promotes severe economic uncertainty, asserting that successful business demands predictability and the ability to spread the costs. In particular, busi-

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198. See Superfund Attorneys Discuss Flaws in CERCLA Liability System at Law Conference, DAILY ENVTL. REP. NEWS (BNA) at D14 (Feb. 16, 1996). Some have argued that the EPA has not effectively used the tools at their disposal. See Van Cleve supra note 10, at 2 n.12, 13 (noting that the EPA has only entered into five NBARs and 128 de minimis settlements at 1074 NPL sites) (citing Superfund: Further EPA Management Action Is Needed to Reduce Legal Expenses, U.S. Gen. Acct. Office No. B-253857, at 6 (1994) (emphasis added)).

199. See Anderson, supra note 2, at 12-13 (noting the difficulties occurring when evidence has been destroyed or lost); Shanahan, supra note 17, at 5 (providing the example of a business owner from the 1960s to the 1970s who would not, as a matter of course, have kept his records for such a lengthy period of time).

200. See Anderson, supra note 2, at 12-13; Shanahan, supra note 17, at 5.

201. See Anderson, supra note 2, at 12-13.

202. In allocating liability courts may consider evidence to determine if there is any third party defense under 42 U.S.C. § 9607(b)(3), or if the waste contribution percentage of the defendant can be approximated. Thus, the lack of evidentiary materials impacts both threshold liability and liability allocation. See Anderson, supra note 2, at 24; supra note 10 and accompanying text.

203. See Freeman, supra note 41, at 682. Senators Domenici and others had similar concerns during the passage of CERCLA in 1980. See COMMITTEE PRINT, supra note 42, at 426. Retroactive liability does not allow for efficient cost spreading. See Anderson, supra note 2, at 35. In particular, retroactivity does not enable a company to
nesses brood over two problems created by CERCLA—the loss of predictability and the difficulty of finding adequate insurance. One commentator notes that the "foreseeability of legal consequences is one of the most important elements in predicting economic consequences" and that retroactive CERCLA liability precludes the predictability necessary to run a successful industry and attract investment. Secondly, CERCLA retroactivity materially affects business's ability to properly insure against loss; in fact, environmental liability insurance is nearly non-existent in this country following the enactment of CERCLA. Both of these issues address a PRPs' ability to internalize the cost of pollution. Retroactive application of CERCLA does not permit such internalizing and inequitably foists the cost burden onto parties who had no real ability to make choices by weighing the costs of polluting against the benefits.

D. CERCLA Retroactivity is not Supported by the Requisite Congressional Intent

Beyond matters of environmental policy and statutory purpose, opponents of CERCLA retroactivity argue that there is little evidence of Congress's intent to apply CERCLA retroactively and thus such application should not be judicially favored. This reasoning flows from the dearth of evidence available to measure congressional intent. As noted above, CERCLA's pilgrimage to enactment lacks the usual formal re-

204. See Dancy & Dancy, supra note 10, at 116.
205. See Freeman, supra note 41, at 682.
206. See id. at 683. Freeman also notes that this insurance void has harmed small businesses as well as American competitiveness in a world where other countries do not have to confront environmental retroactive liability. Id. Other commentators also acknowledge the debilitating impact on economic competitiveness. See, e.g., Dancy & Dancy, supra note 10, at 104-05 & n.6. See also COMMITTEE PRINT, supra note 42, at 428 (expressing concerns of several senators about insurance issues which CERCLA would produce).
207. See supra note 12 and accompanying text.
208. See Gergen, supra note 12, at 629-30 (arguing that CERCLA's current liability structure has provided no incentives to act responsibly primarily because no real internalization of costs have taken place).
209. See supra notes 40-60 and accompanying text.
210. See id.
cord necessary for adequate statutory interpretation, and the patchy record that does exist does not reveal clear congressional intent regarding retroactivity.\(^{211}\) A curious circle of logic results whereby many courts find congressional intent for retroactive application while acknowledging that the legislative history is incomplete.\(^{212}\) Opponents couple this lack of requisite congressional intent with the statute's failure to expressly promulgate retroactivity in advocating that such an application of CERCLA disregards judicial precedent establishing a presumption against retroactivity.\(^{213}\) In sum, lower courts rely on shaky grounds to find the necessary congressional intent to buttress CERCLA retroactivity.\(^{214}\)

V. PROPOSALS MODIFYING CERCLA RETROACTIVITY:
THE REFORM MOVEMENT GENERALLY

CERCLA reform awaits. As more commentators analyze the endangerment of CERCLA, they advocate a broad range of cures for the statute's evident ills.\(^{215}\) These prescriptions tend to follow one of two approaches—either they call for minor operations or they advocate major surgery.\(^{216}\)

A. Minor Reforms: Carveouts

Some have proffered a restructuring in the form of carve-outs for certain PRPs to provide greater fairness in the way that CERCLA is currently administered.\(^{217}\) These carveout proposals tend to focus on PRPs in-

211. For example, no hearings were transcribed. See Freeman, supra note 41, at 18.
212. See, e.g., Ohio ex rel. Brown v. Georgeoff, 562 F. Supp. 1300, 1311-14 (N.D. Ohio 1983) (noting that retroactivity was not raised in congressional debates, but still finding the necessary congressional intent for it).
214. See generally Freeman, supra note 41, at 671-78. (arguing that the legislative history of CERCLA is too incomplete to warrant a finding of adequate congressional intent to override the pervasive judicial presumption against retroactive application of a statute).
215. See Ways-Means, supra note 24, at 385; Anderson, supra note 2, at 4-6; Dancy & Dancy, supra note 10, at 104-06; see also Evans, supra note 16 (describing the EPA's administrative reforms regarding the problem of "orphan shares"); Powers, supra note 95.
216. See Anderson, supra note 2, at 5-6 & nn.22-23, 47.
217. See id. at 5-6 nn.22-23, 47 (noting carveout proposals for lenders, landowners,
directly linked to hazardous waste problems at the site. Among the groups targeted for possible carveouts are lenders who own the property only in transition or as the result of foreclosure. Other groups include municipalities and innocent landowners. While seeking to rectify situations which often produce inequitable results, such limited proposals ignore the systemic problems of the CERCLA scheme, and, instead, only rescue certain groups from liability.

B. Major Reforms: Re-structuring the Liability Scheme

Much of the dialogue on reform advocates major surgery on CERCLA, claiming that carveouts only serve to prolong the pain. Professor Jerry Anderson has proposed that the EPA administratively assign liability, in a cost allocating manner, rather than relying on strict liability and joint and several liability. Still others, including influential Congressman Michael Oxley, sponsor of the CERCLA reform bill H.R. 2500, and House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Archer, have called for reform through elimination of all or most of the statute's retroactivity. Additionally, CERCLA reformers have promoted substituting strict liability

and municipalities); see also Oswald, supra note 12, at 635-36 (arguing that CERCLA liability should not be extended to corporate individuals because it does not further the goals of CERCLA).

218. See Anderson, supra note 2, at 6 (describing many of the proposals as seeking efficiency and equity). As a cautionary note, Anderson warns that some of these proposals have built-in biases favoring a particular special interest group. See id.

219. See id. at 5-6 nn.21-22.

220. See id.

221. See id. at 48. ("Whittling away at the edges of CERCLA unfairness will not solve the problem.").

222. See, e.g., id.

223. See id. at 48-56 (proposing that identified PRPs would have an affirmative requirement to establish where and how [their] waste was disposed of and that all of the information would be given to an Administrative Law Judge who would then, based on a formula, make an assignment of shares in the liability).

224. See Ways-Means, supra note 24, at 365; Freeman, supra note 41, at 673; see also Goldberg, supra note 19, at 713 (arguing that the European Community should articulate a clear policy against retroactive liability). Republicans have pushed bills in Congress attempting to abolish retroactivity either before 1980, or, in the alternative, 1987, and to make Superfund clean the waste up. See Powers, supra note 95; Tucker, supra note 25.
with a fairer negligence standard.\textsuperscript{225} The palpable intensity of the calls for reform indicates the seriousness of CERCLA’s statutory ills; the elimination of retroactivity tops the list of potential reforms.\textsuperscript{226}

C. Reforming Retroactivity: A Negligence Standard for Retroactive PRPs

Several reformers have focused on altering CERCLA’s retroactivity.\textsuperscript{227} Their proposals include an elimination of retroactivity entirely or alternatively, a retroactivity discount.\textsuperscript{228} To achieve the goal of fairness without gutting CERCLA’s fundamental purpose, the most viable proposal is one which would utilize a negligence standard for retroactive PRPs.\textsuperscript{229} This negligence standard would apply solely to retroactive PRPs and leave in place the strict and joint and several liability standards for other PRPs as well as negligent retroactive PRPs.\textsuperscript{230} As a result, pre-enactment PRPs who can show that they “played by the rules” will not pay, while pre-enactment negligent PRPs who benefited in an ill-gotten manner from their hazardous waste disposal will continue to pay their fair share or more.\textsuperscript{231} Most importantly, a negligence standard for retroac-

\textsuperscript{225} See Anderson, supra note 2, at 5 n.22 (citing \textit{Strict Liability Should Be Replaced By Negligence Standard, Industry Group Says}, 24 Env’t Rep. (BNA) 193 (May 28, 1993); see also Oswald, supra note 12, at 584-85 (advocating negligence standard for corporate individuals).

\textsuperscript{226} Typical of the comments is that of Professor Anderson: “Not only is the system of assigning liability for cleanup costs manifestly unfair, it simply is not working.” Anderson, supra note 2, at 4 (citations omitted).

\textsuperscript{227} See supra notes 140, 223 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{228} See supra note 140 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{229} See Dennis E. Eckart, \textit{Superfund, the Environment and Fair Taxation}, WASH. TIMES, Nov. 12, 1996, at A23 (arguing that the cost of eliminating retroactivity would be reconstituted by the Superfund corporate taxes which are a much fairer and more efficient method of funding waste cleanup); see also supra note 226 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{230} See Eckart, supra note 229, at A23.

\textsuperscript{231} Fundamental to CERCLA’s polluter pays principal is the concept that the PRPs who benefited from their evils should not escape liability. See supra notes 154-56 and accompanying text. Utilizing a negligence standard will still ensnare this category of polluters while granting a modicum of equity to those who acted reasonably and fairly at the time of the disposal. See supra notes 178-80 and accompanying text. In essence, a negligence standard, unlike an elimination of all retroactive application, does not permit unconscionable polluters to elude liability and thus rewards conscionable behavior. See Eckart, supra note 229, at A23.
tive liability will not severely undermine Superfund revenues because shortfalls can be recouped through the following two financing channels: (1) incremental Superfund tax increases on the beneficiaries of hazardous waste disposal—the chemical and oil industries—and (2) the potential elimination of the government's transaction costs incurred in pursuing any available PRP. CERCLA reform under a negligence standard for pre-enactment PRPs upholds CERCLA integrity while largely negating its inherent flaws.

VI. CONCLUSION

CERCLA's effectiveness remains open to question from supporters and opponents alike. Certainly, CERCLA's judicially sanctioned retroactivity has substantially impacted the statute's ability to clean up sites and fairly partition the costs. This retroactivity has engendered serious fairness questions, caused inequitable liabilities among PRPs, and unnecessarily endangered economic competitiveness. Eliminating retroactivity without requisite culpability would re-direct CERCLA to its fundamental purpose and further streamline cost recovery and clean-up at existing sites by eliminating transaction costs associated with PRPs who lack practical connection to and real responsibility for hazardous waste. Unaware pre-1980 PRPs, like Troop 1313, would thus evade a retroactive liability over which they had no power to avoid through internalization of costs and to which they did not actively contribute. On the other hand, such PRPs may have negligibly contributed to the problem by failing to investigate the property's potential waste problems. This omission, however, does not square with the massive costs they may be forced to bear under CERCLA retroactivity—particularly given that, prior to CERCLA, a purchaser of land had no duty to inquire into hazardous waste problems.

The negligence standard for retroactive PRPs advocated above places the burden on those who directly caused the waste and may have benefited from it, and goes far toward ending the sting of inequity felt by so

232. See supra notes 131-33 and accompanying text.
233. See Eckart, supra note 229, at A23.
234. See Dancy & Dancy, supra note 10, at 104.
235. See supra notes 15, 17 and accompanying text.
236. See supra notes 170-207 and accompanying text.
237. See Gergen, supra note 12, at 683-86 (arguing that "Indirectly Involved Landowners" should be subject to a negligence rule accompanied by fair apportionment of liability).
238. See id; see supra note 16 and accompanying text.
239. See, e.g., supra note 21 and accompanying text.
many who innocently owned the land prior to CERCLA enactment.\textsuperscript{240} Those pre-1980 PRPs eliminated by this standard would become “orphan shares” and the potential funding shortfall would be shifted to the Superfund, which is appropriately supported by the chemical, petroleum and feedstock industries.\textsuperscript{241} Ending retroactive liability without culpability would also materially downsize the enormous transaction costs spent pursuing potential contributors and speed site remediation without a complete eradication of the necessary revenue streams and without a freeing of the culpable.\textsuperscript{242} In such an environment, we may be able to get back to the matter at hand—cleansing the land of toxic waste—and ignore the frantic pursuit of innocent pre-1980 owners of infected land.

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\textsuperscript{240} See supra notes 2-21 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{241} See supra notes 131-33 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{242} See supra notes 135-37 and accompanying text.