Consumers Group: You are a U.S. Defense Department Official

Your Background and Biography

You studied engineering at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on a scholarship from the U.S. Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). After 9/11 you switched to active duty. While leading a platoon in Iraq, you were wounded when a roadside bomb detonated. One of your legs had to be amputated, leaving you wondering what to do with the rest of your life.

After months in the hospital you decided to go back to school for an advanced degree in engineering. One of your undergraduate professors recommended the Georgia Institute of Technology. There you joined a lab that researched how metals decay over time (metal fatigue), which led to a job with the Defense Logistics Agency after graduation.

Ten years and a lot of hard work later, you were promoted to chief of the Defense Logistics Agency Strategic Materials Planning Branch. You are one of many civilians involved in managing the National Defense Stockpile, a program created after World War II to reduce U.S. dependence on foreign sources of critical materials. You now supervise a team of materials engineers, economists, and analysts who figure out how to reduce the military’s vulnerability to disruption in the supply chain of raw materials. Rare earth metals are among the raw materials essential for many military applications.

During the Cold War the government built up big piles of raw materials in secret warehouses around the country. But that was expensive and led to waste, with stockpiled materials slowly becoming unusable. So you are now pushing your organization in a new direction. You are trying to develop domestic sources of rare earth metals, including through recycling programs that can recover rare earth metal from electronic waste. A thriving domestic industry with plenty of productive capacity means no need for government warehouses.

Acting on behalf of the Department of Defense, your goal in these negotiations is to create a Sustainability Seal that will encourage development of a reliable domestic supply of rare earth elements for U.S. national security. In order to decrease the nation’s reliance on material imports, it is essential to create incentives to recycle and produce
rare earths, while exploring possible sites around the country to establish regulated mining and refining operations.

Your Mission

Your goal at this hearing is to convince the Stewardship Council to include the Consumers Group’s recommendations in its final Sustainability Seal guiding values. To make this argument effectively, you must do the following:

- Complete the assigned readings listed at the bottom of this page.
- Work closely with the other members of your group to develop clear answers to the Stewardship Council’s questions.
- Use as much specific information as possible to develop strong arguments for your position that sustainable rare earth production must ensure the availability of products that meet society’s needs, while producing them in ways that are ethically and environmentally acceptable to a range of purchasers.
- Read as much as you can about your position and the positions of the other groups.
- Complete written reflections on your character, interest group, and readings as assigned.

Your Victory Objectives

- **You will receive 10 points** if the Stewards select your group’s proposal as the final Sustainability Seal guiding values.
- The Stewards will rank the interest groups by how well their goals are represented in the final Sustainability Seal guiding values. **You will receive between 1 and 4 points** based on how the Consumers Group is ranked and how well the Sustainability Seal guiding values reflect your goals.

SOURCES

Group Sources

- Consumers Case Study: “[Can Consumer Choices Make Rare Earth Production More Sustainable?”](#)

Individual Sources

- Grasso, Valerie Bailey. “[Rare Earth Elements in National Defense: Background, Oversight Issues, and Options for Congress.”](#) Congressional Research Service
White Paper, December 23, 2013. (Read pp. 10–15, “Background on Rare Earth Elements” through “Supply Chain Issues.”)