Consumers Group: You are a Technology Writer

Your Background and Biography

Growing up in a large family living in a small suburban home in Ann Arbor, Michigan, you found escape in reading and journaling. At the University of Michigan you majored in journalism with a science, technology, and society minor. You started your career as a reporter at a local newspaper and soon found your niche writing about personal computers and software.

You became a nationally prominent voice during the early 2000s, at a time when many Americans felt that consumer electronics were transforming daily life. The New York Times recruited you to be a consumer technology columnist. You were an enthusiastic “first adopter,” the kind of person always ready to buy the newest products from tech companies. Your product reviews have guided millions of consumers.

You also learned about the materials behind consumer technologies. A public television producer hired you to host a documentary on materials science. You explored the origins of the rare earth elements used in cell phones. Audiences responded to your fondness for bad puns and willingness to do ridiculous things on camera.

The Stewards have invited you to this negotiation to be a voice for the people who buy consumer electronics. You are excited by the ways that manufacturers use rare earth elements to make amazing products, so you want to make sure that rare earths are readily available for use. But you understand the need for ethical production practices, and you think most American consumers also understand. Of course workers should be safe, and landscapes should not be poisoned by the production of rare earth elements. You want a Sustainability Seal that ensures the availability of rare earth elements and reduces the impact of their production, while keeping costs low enough that ordinary consumers can buy the best products.

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

● PBS. “Rare Earth Elements.” In NOVA: Hunting the Elements. Video, April 4, 2012. (The relevant section is from 1:25:25 to 1:32:30, unless you want to learn how rare earths might be used as a shark repellent, in which case watch until 1:39:35.)