

The Recorder

IN THE COMMUNITY, ABOUT THE COMMUNITY, SINCE 1877.

2015-07-09 / Letters

Highland County: 'Take one for the team'

Editor, The Recorder,

I write in response to a story published last week, "Dominion amplifies urgency, pumps up pipeline PR efforts." As a member of the recently formed EnergySure coalition, and landowner on both sides of Highland County (Clay, Braxton, and Nicholas counties in West Virginia, Albemarle and Fluvanna counties in Virginia), I feel the need to respond to this misleading article.

EnergySure is a group of more than 100 business and labor organizations from across Virginia, West Virginia and North Carolina. It was formed to promote the Atlantic Coast Pipeline as a necessary infrastructure project to deliver reliable energy to homes and businesses in this region.

I joined the coalition because the pipeline project stands to provide significant economic benefits and local tax revenue in Virginia. Latest estimates show that during construction the project will support 8,800 jobs and result in \$1.4 billion in economic activity. Once in operation, the pipeline is expected to result in almost \$38 million in economic activity, support 1,300 jobs. What other infrastructure project is happening right now that has such a large impact on jobs and the economy?

To reject the need for this project is simply foolish. Bringing jobs and affordable energy is how we kick start an economy that has had zero GDP growth this year, and has been sluggish at best for the last few years. The economic opportunity this project brings is why the project has bipartisan support; the endorsement of the governors of Virginia, West Virginia and North Carolina and more than 115 groups and businesses who do business in this region. Highland County has had so much trouble funding their schools for several years now. You depend on your farmers and residents to pay higher and higher taxes to just maintain the status quo. Allowing this pipeline through will go a long ways toward solving that problem with the huge influx of county taxes Dominion will pay you each year! Do this for your kids and help your tax burdens at the same time. Allow the pipeline to go through.

EnergySure is much more than a "PR effort" as The Recorder reports; it is a coalition of real people and businesses who support the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and understand the large economic impact this project will have across Virginia, West Virginia, and North Carolina. Visit their website to learn about the group: www.energysure.com.

The demonizing of Dominion needs to stop. These are folks, just like we are, that are trying to make a living and do the right thing. Just ask your neighbors over in Bath how Dominion has been to them with the pumped storage facility. They have reaped the benefits of that facility for decades now, and facts are facts. I have never worked a day for Dominion myself, but to portray them as greedy industrialists is just plain wrong! We need them just as much as they need us now. Let's keep the discourse at reasonable levels on all sides.

I know Highland County is different than any place else I have been. I understand your reservations, most of which are very well founded and smart in this day and age. As simple as my next statement may sound, both sides of your beautiful county need you to help us out economically. Take one for the team. Not meaning to make the fur fly even more than it already is, but central West Virginia and central Virginia need your help. We will all benefit in the long run, including Highland. Progress eventually is inevitable. We all know that. Without coal to generate our power anymore, this is the only reasonable way to help the environment and maintain a reasonable standard of living. I want wind turbines and solar power generation too, but our present demand is so much more than those sources can handle. We need as many power generating sources as we can muster.

This project brings jobs and tax revenue to the region and it can all be done safely and with minimal impact to the environment. Sounds like a winner to me. As a property owner in two affected states that I love and a Virginia business owner, I support progress and the construction of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline.

Please help, and let's stay as civil about this as we all can. Neither camp is the devil. I also love the Recorder. I have read it every week since the late '70s and will continue to do so.

Scott Bazarre
Buck Island, Va.

2015-07-16 / Letters

Pipeline proponents must weigh all costs

Editor, The Recorder,

Mr. Scott Bazarre's letter published in the July 9 Recorder supports the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline as "a necessary infrastructure project to deliver reliable energy" and calls on Highland County residents "to help us out economically. Take one for the team." Continuing, he explains that "central West Virginia and central Virginia need your help. We will all benefit in the long run, including Highland. Progress eventually is inevitable. We all know that." Mr. Bazarre seems to genuinely believe his assertions. He shouldn't.

1. Any proposed business project – whether it be a \$5 billion natural gas pipeline or the expansion of a small business such as Mr. Bazarre's electrical contracting firm – must be evaluated in terms of what the net benefits will be before deciding whether the project is financially justified in pursuing. That is, the projected benefits should be weighed against the projected costs. If there are no net benefits, the project should not proceed.

Dominion Resources and its partners have claimed that a major justification for the ACP is that it would create jobs and bring economic benefits to the affected states and counties. The projected benefits cited are based on two economic studies, one by Chmura of Richmond, and the other by ICF International of Fairfax. In a study released last week, done by Synapse Energy Economics of Cambridge, Mass., a widely respected firm that also does work for the U.S. Department of Energy and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the Chmura and ICF reports were found to lack verifiable data and that they "do not provide the useful, objective tools necessary to inform a public decision-making process meant to ensure the

public good.” Synapse also noted that “neither report accounted for any of the environmental and societal costs that the pipeline might impose on local communities.”

Mr. Bazzarre asks, “What other infrastructure project is happening right now that has such a large impact on jobs and the economy?” The proposed ACP would certainly have an impact on the economy and jobs, but not all of it would be positive for those affected. Very few of the jobs that are claimed to be created by the ACP during construction would go to local people. In the meantime, many businesses and other economic ventures along the proposed routes being considered by the ACP would have their livelihoods negatively affected, resulting in a loss of jobs and income.

The tax revenues paid by the project to the counties are also cited as a benefit. But this claim ignores the dampening affect the ACP is already having on property values. There are increasing instances of prospective buyers of real estate in Highland County who are deciding against purchasing property because of the pipeline. Less demand translates into lower property values and ultimately lower tax revenues.

In short, to sell the pipeline to public officials and the public, Dominion is citing only the projected gross benefits of the project – and those are exaggerated and misleading – while failing to acknowledge that there are costs to the affected communities. For some communities, the costs will outweigh the projected benefits. Further details of the Synapse report and a link to it were reported upon in the July 9 Recorder.

2. The ACP is also being justified on the grounds that it is needed. It may be, but the case has yet to be convincingly made by the proponents.

When Dominion’s CEO Tom Farrell and Gov. McAuliffe announced last September the formation of the ACP partnership, both gentlemen said that had the pipeline been in place the previous winter, Virginia could have avoided the high natural gas prices customers had experienced. It was also cited that the conversion of coal-fired electric utilities in Virginia and North Carolina to natural gas – mandated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency – will require the construction of the pipeline to bring the plentiful gas being produced from the Marcellus shale reserves in West Virginia to growing markets.

But, how much new gas will truly be needed? What is the adequacy of existing pipeline capacities to meet this increased demand? How much additional capacity will be required to supply that gas? And, how long will the supply of natural gas from the Marcellus fields be available? These are supply/demand questions that have not yet been satisfactorily answered by Dominion, but some recent studies are worth noting.

A June 2014 report by the Natural Gas Supply Association said that pipeline capacity for the Mid-Atlantic/ Southeast markets was sufficient and that natural gas prices were half of what they had been 10 years before.

A February 2015 U.S. Department of Energy report on natural gas infrastructure needs in light of increased electric demands in the future concluded that pipeline capacity increases in the past several years “are likely to reduce the need for future pipeline infrastructure.”

Given that there are two other proposed pipeline projects that seek to satisfy increased natural gas demands for markets in the Mid-Atlantic/Southeast region (Mountain Valley Pipeline and Appalachian Connector), what new infrastructure is truly necessary? The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission will hopefully address this critical question. But, others should also be asking it.

3. Environmental challenges presented by the construction and operation of the proposed ACP is a major concern to those counties potentially affected by the ACP. Gov. McAuliffe has proclaimed that the ACP construction and operation should be held to the highest environmental standards. While this point is not covered in Mr. Bazzarre's letter, the EnergySure website claims that inspectors "will be conducting tests throughout the construction to ensure (water) quality is the same after the project is completed as it was before." But, there is growing evidence that this will not be the case. Recent discussions with responsible staff at the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality have produced an admission that state regulators do not have sufficient resources and expertise to assure that needed environmental standards are followed in constructing the ACP. This concern prompted the Nelson County Board of Supervisors this week to unanimously adopt a resolution expressing its concerns to the DEQ over erosion and sediment control issues presented by the ACP.

The issue of water quality, particularly in karst terrain like we have in Highland County, is also addressed sharply by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in July 14 comments it sent to Dominion in which the agency staff raised serious concerns and questions about the ACP's intended procedures in addressing environmental concerns. For Highland County in particular, the proposed routes under consideration would present a serious risk to the water supply of the town of Monterey. The threat of adverse impacts on water quality and erosion/sediment control is a big issue, and must be considered prominently by all who are making judgments about the prudence of the ACP routes.

In conclusion, the debate over whether and where the Atlantic Coast Pipeline should be built is ultimately about values. Assured energy supplies for businesses and home is an important value. But there are costs associated with obtaining needed energy, costs that will adversely affect other values: the ecology and lives of the communities and citizens. Those are values just as important as the need for energy. Perhaps more so.

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