

The Recorder

IN THE COMMUNITY, ABOUT THE COMMUNITY, SINCE 1877.

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We can only fight – and hope — for our future



Those opposed to the Atlantic Coast Pipeline project lined the streets in Hot Springs during the gubernatorial debate Saturday. It reminded us of something William Faulkner once said: “Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world ... would do this, it would change the earth.” We hope those standing up against the pipeline project will continue to raise their voices. (Recorder photo by Geoff Hamill)

Hey, folks, great news. We have lots of money, plenty of investors. We’re going to build a huge complex of apartment buildings and office spaces, even some large homes we can rent out, to make more money.

We need a permit.

No problem. We have friends in the government. We’ve been greasing the wheels for years, nurturing these relationships with generous donations to our friends. They’ve got our backs.

Oh, there are a couple of neighbors who upset. We’re going to build part of it over the orchard they planted years ago. They’re complaining a lot. But no matter; our government friends gave us the authority to take their land. They can always move and start over somewhere else.

Another neighbor pointed out a swampy area in the back corner, and a place on the hillside that tends to fall in landslides when it rains heavy. But no worries. We’ll figure out what to do about that once our construction workers start digging.

The local warden told us about the bats in the cave under the main entrance, but we’re not worried about that, either. We have good engineers. We’ll deal with the caves and bats once we get started.

One lady across the way is worried our industrial complex will ruin her view, and make it dangerous for her to live nearby. She'll be all right. We know how to build safely. And her view won't be so bad if we plant a few trees; they'll reach maturity in about 20 years and then her view will be lovely again.

We know the river near the home sites supports protected fish and endangered mussels, but that's OK. Our government friends understand we'll do our best not to harm them. If we lose a few, that's the cost of doing business. No need to hold up the whole project for a few "indicator species." Most people don't know what those are anyway.

The family with kids nearby is worried about the truck traffic, and out-of-town workers we're going to use. We'll explain it's just temporary. They can always call the sheriff's office if they have trouble. Maybe the state police will bring in extra hands to help with traffic control.

Some tree-hugger said our construction will do too much irreparable damage to the environment. Maybe so. But our project will create jobs, and places to live that people really need. Our government friends understand we all have to make sacrifices to our land and water sometimes, for the sake of the greater good.

We're not worried about those lawsuits, either. We've got the money and legal expertise to drag those out long enough to finish construction, and then it won't matter.

Our investors are thrilled with how much money we're going to make. Let's get started!

This, friends, is analogous to what's happening with Dominion Energy and its proposed gas transmission pipeline, except on a vastly larger scale.

Against any intelligent stream of consciousness, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has deemed the Atlantic Coast Pipeline as passing muster when it comes to environmental and socio-economic thresholds when weighed against the so-called "benefits" of the project.

Dear Dominion: A bit of humility never hurts. Communities are complex beings that stay strong as long as they're healthy, much as a person's health relies on adequate air, water, rest, and food. Can you stuff down what you see as a "win," and have one iota of compassion for the hurt you've put on regular people who stand in the way of your money-making endeavor?

Dear FERC staff: Thanks for trying, but we're sending you back to the drawing board. You have reached conclusions, and sometimes pushed for information, but you didn't have all the data to issue that final impact statement. C'mon, now, all those loose ends cannot be handled by the pipeline company your statement represents. You know it, and we know it. In 866 pages of just Volume 1 — of four — how many times did you remind us that not all the data is in, reports are missing, and some agency or another hasn't weighed in yet? Dozens and dozens, and dozens.

But don't worry, you tell us. You have conditions for taking care of those things, and you, the inspectors, and other agencies will make sure they stick to it.

Oh, that's a relief. We can only hope.

Dear U.S. Forest Service: We were counting on you the most, and you let us down with your conclusion that it's possible to make way for this pipeline across our lands just by changing your forest plans a little.

Thanks for opening up a public comment period on that, though. That's more than we'll get from FERC at this point. You can bet you'll hear from a whole lot of people who understand those lands you manage belong to them — citizens and taxpayers — and they will insist you not allow Dominion to denigrate the land we love and use.

You stood by your word before when it came to protecting an endangered species. Can you? — will you? — do it again?

Dear Virginia Department of Environmental Quality: We never felt confident in you, and now we know your policies fall at the whim of Dominion's influence. It's no wonder you've been sued already.

Thanks to you, too, for opening up for public comment, but really? We have to drive for hours to attend those meetings? You can't schedule one a little closer to where we live? We're paying your gas bill, what have you got to lose by driving another 30 miles?

We know you're putting several carts before several horses, all of which only serve to abdicate your authority — your very mission — to protect our lands and waters.

Buck up. You can do better. We pay your salaries; we expect stronger results for our money.

Dear Virginia Outdoors Foundation: FERC expressly acknowledges you have the power to stand behind your words. Use it.

FERC heard you when you said Dominion should avoid crossing the open space easements you hold on private property; that you have a legal obligation to protect the conservation values attached to them; that easements provide public benefits by protecting in perpetuity significant tracts of mostly undeveloped land that contribute to the protection of water quality, productive soils, natural heritage resources, historic resources, and scenic viewsheds.

FERC heard you say Virginia's investments in conservation could be jeopardized by the project; the degradation of protected resources would result in a loss of confidence in the effectiveness of open-space easements by the public; and the impact associated with the proposed conversion would be *very significant*.

FERC did not take this decision from your hands. We can at least thank the agency for that much.

Listen to your own guts. You may well be the last federal or state agency left with any reasonable thinking among its leadership. Do not approve Dominion's applications for

converting the easements. You know what's at stake — for your agency, and the people who trusted you.

Dear Gov. McAuliffe: We stood with jaws gaping when you set this whole thing in motion with your over-exuberant support for this monstrosity nearly four years ago, before you had any reliable information on how it would affect thousands of people in the most rural area of the state you vowed to serve — and actually took time to visit.

Set it straight: Support the Virginia Outdoors Foundation in protecting those easement landowners. Tell the new gubernatorial candidate in your party to resist Dominion's heady enticements of money and power. Remind Dr. Northam that he, too, is aiming to serve these people, and he'd better think harder about what Dominion has done to them already.

Dear strong-willed, fortified citizens and grassroots groups doing your level best to save your property, your livelihoods, and your family farms from this corporate takeover: Do. Not. Give. Up.