

# The Recorder

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## Augusta Senator weighs in on pipelines

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*Editor's note: The following commentary was written by Sen. Emmett Hanger (R-24th District) regarding the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline, in his September edition of his newsletter, "Virginia Voice." Sen. Hanger represents parts of Culpeper County, all of Madison County, parts of Rockingham County and all of Augusta and Greene counties. The district also includes the cities of Staunton and Waynesboro.*

STAUNTON — The proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline is not new news. The pipeline has been on all of our collective radar for several years now. The project, which is largely overseen and permitted by the federal government, has gone through multiple phases as it relates to its path, federal review by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and other related agencies and entities, and it also has included some state review including the Department of Environmental Quality and the State Water Board.

Early phases of the project have started and been stalled several times and still are being reviewed by the courts for matters related to environmental concerns. The most recent stoppage is a result of a ruling from the U.S. 4th Circuit Court of Appeals dealing with two vacated permits issued by the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Some people strongly support the pipeline and some vehemently protest the idea of it.

I like the idea of walking over to the kitchen doorway and being able to flip on the lights or listening to some bluegrass on my radio or turning the air down when it gets too hot in the house. Energy makes that happen and boy, do we notice it when the power goes out!

I also admire the natural heritage and beauty of our valley, the health of our waterways, and I pray these environmental bounties will be around for my grandchildren and their grandchildren to enjoy. I have spent years working in the legislature to do just that!

But as with many things in life, things are not completely black and white. The pipeline could be considered one of those things.

I support the goal of energy independence. I have advocated for renewable energy such as solar. I think we as a state, and as a nation, should be proactive in moving away from needing to buy fuel from other countries.

But I have stated publicly in the media and via constituent correspondence, through legislation, and in numerous discussions with the administration (Gov. Northam's and Gov. McAuliffe's) and with agency and department heads that I have concerns about this specific pipeline proposal because of its route.

I have spoken out regarding the path of the pipeline, property rights concerns, and environmental concerns, including disruption of farmland, water quality, the karst environment and the potential for sinkholes and collapses, and overall general safety. I also have questioned whether such a pipeline will provide any kind of lasting economic development for our specific area.

Sure, construction will provide some jobs and material needs but without a trunk-line off-loading gas here, will our citizens reap any real and lasting benefits from the fuel supply or enjoy any potential economic savings?

I do think perhaps some regions of the state might be well-suited to benefit from the pipeline and its construction but I do not believe our unique natural heritage nor our topography are suited for such a plan, nor I am convinced our economic base will be boosted locally long-term.

Last session, I negotiated and successfully patroned legislation that ensures environmental concerns, particularly regarding water quality, will be reviewed by the DEQ for permitting future pipeline projects. I worked with pipeline company representatives; environmental groups; advocacy groups for and against; DEQ, the Secretary of Natural Resources, the Governor's office, and a handful others.

There was a lot of give and take and versions of legislative drafts right up until final passage. Frankly, no one left fully satisfied which, for the groups represented and with their vastly differing viewpoints, to come to a final, logical and productive piece of legislation was a pretty big deal!

And while this legislation does not apply directly to ACP and the Mountain Valley Pipeline, I have advocated to the administration, the DEQ, Secretary of Natural Resources, the State Water Board and others that this law should provide solid guidance and structure as to how DEQ should insure water quality with these two projects as well.

We will see how the courts handle the project moving forward but I am committed to making sure, at least at the state level, that safety and environmental concerns are fully vetted and reviewed.