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Court's decision on pipeline case a bump in the road

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Editor, The Recorder,

The Supreme Court's recent decision to hear Dominion's appeal for reinstatement of the permit to cross the Appalachian Trail is a bump in the road, not the end of the story. However this case is decided, the Atlantic Coast Pipeline faces many more challenges.

As the case goes forward, public appreciation of the weakness of the ACP proposal will continue to grow. Rather than carefully planning the best, least damaging route for this huge project, Dominion rushed ahead to secure potentially huge profits. To gain the necessary approvals, it relied on outdated laws like the Natural Gas Act, the industry-captured Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and its political pull with the state governments on the route.

As shown by the numerous vacated and challenged permits, Dominion's analyses of adverse impacts on the environment and local communities were woefully inadequate.

Dominion's appeal to the Supreme Court is a Hail Mary attempt to rescue a pipeline that is clearly in jeopardy. The ACP is two years behind schedule and close to \$3 billion over the estimated cost.

Dominion's captive ratepayers are waking up to the billions of dollars they will be compelled to pay for the pipeline and the additional 15 percent "return on equity" guaranteed by federal law.

Investors are growing wary of fossil fuels; Moody's has downgraded the ACP to a risky investment. Renewable energy continues its trend of increasing efficiency and declining cost. The myth of methane as a "bridge fuel" has evaporated. Public concern about climate change is growing explosively worldwide.

The Supreme Court is expected to hear the AT case in the spring and render its decision some months later — assuming the turmoil in Washington doesn't complicate things.

In the meantime, expect Dominion to escalate its attempt to slip an amendment giving last-minute congressional approval into a large, must-pass bill and continue to drum up "grassroots" support for the ACP. Dominion has a lot riding on its pipeline — though not nearly as much as the communities in the path of this unnecessary, dangerous and costly project.

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