

The Recorder

Inclusive, independent, indispensable.

Ordinary citizens become extraordinary

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And just like that, we are done with Dominion.

After more than six years of debating the merits of the corporation's highly controversial plans for a 600-mile, \$8 billion gas transmission line, the project died a fitting death on Sunday afternoon.

Just like that, hundreds of people in three states and beyond could reclaim the thousands of hours they'd been investing almost daily in opposing and protesting the plan.

Just like that, landowners could look out over their beloved properties and breathe, knowing the threat was gone. Their mountain ridges would exist unmolested. Their water supplies would not be tainted. Their peaceful enjoyment of daily life was no longer threatened by the sound of heavy machinery that would have clogged our roads on their way to permanently scarring the landscape. And the thousands of dollars they'd been investing to protect themselves and the environment could now be spent in more meaningful ways.

The 1,000-pound weight on the shoulders of ordinary citizens was lifted, just like that.

The collective sense of relief is palpable.

But look again: We now know, if we didn't already, that these were no ordinary citizens.

No indeed. People who had never before been called to action rose up and found extraordinary tenacity and determination in the face of exceedingly long odds. They applied sustained, heavy pressure over the course of years, wherever and however they could.

Housewives became adept at navigating a federal docket. Teachers taught themselves how to read the endlessly dry jargon of engineering plans and environmental theses. Musicians became leaders of protests. Retirees put aside their travel plans, turned their kitchen tables into research libraries, and became investigators and reporters. Loggers and farmers became tour guides, showing others where the delicate balance of wetlands or ancient trees were located. Spelunkers

shined their bright lights on the risk to karst topography beneath our feet and taught geology. Professors and scientists who had long given up their careers donated countless hours of their expertise. Business owners, from lodging proprietors to real estate agents, became intimately familiar with the vocabulary of state and federal regulations, laws, and the politics behind them.

They doggedly took Dominion to task. They drove to Richmond, or Washington, to attend hearings or stand in protest outside the General Assembly and the now-leveled company headquarters. They wrote letters; they sat in trees; they hosted meetings; they wrote songs and made documentaries; they made phone calls and signs and websites. They put thousands of their own dollars behind the organizations that joined forces for legal battles and research. They pushed their elected leaders.

They demanded details. They demanded fairness. They demanded information, justification, and truth.

And they never gave up.

Make no mistake: Convincing federal and state regulators that a pipeline running through the last best place on Earth was a losing proposition from the get-go.

Dominion Energy had a strong hold on the Old Dominion, curated over years of putting its millions into lobbying efforts to create laws in its favor.

That tide has turned, and we hope no corporate entity is ever again allowed to wield that much power — to take people's land, dodge responsibility, or be that reckless with the environment, and people's lives.

The controversy surrounding the ACP has educated each of us about how we're governed. Now more than ever, we know how much our votes count, and how critical it is to pay attention to the laws and policies that regulate everything from waterways to public input, from the power of money to the power of our legal systems.

The vast volumes of information generated about this project and the places it affected should exist in single repository somewhere easily accessed, not just on the case docket at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for this project. It will be a valuable resource to generations in the future who may again need the knowledge acquired here when they must evaluate other proposals that threaten homes, forests, and rivers.

Residents and landowners in Bath and Highland have successfully fought off these kinds of ugly self-serving developments before, and they will again. They will also return their focus to lifting our economies without damaging our precious quality of life.

But for now, they will breathe.