

“NO BUSINESS AS USUAL”: OVER 130 GROUPS NATIONWIDE ANNOUNCE THEIR OPPOSITION TO FERC APPOINTMENTS

Signers of pledge agree to block Trump Administration appointments to the Federal Energy Resource Commission; Action called for on FERC’s rubber stamping of pipelines

Washington DC//March 8, 2017 - Over 130 organizations across the country announced today that they will oppose nominees made by the Trump Administration to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). The move reflects the growing resistance nationwide from residents, farmers, business owners, physicians, and environmentalists to FERC’s practice of recklessly permitting pipelines that put hundreds of communities and the drinking water of millions of Americans at risk, in addition to the global climate.

The 135 groups range from dozens of local community organizations and activists to national nonprofit organizations (Beyond Extreme Energy, Center for Biological Diversity, Food and Water Watch, and Green America). At a time when citizens are increasingly calling on Senators to oppose appointed officials that support the fossil fuel industry, the pledge signers, representing over a million people nationwide, pledge to work against each nominee to FERC made by the Trump Administration, and to call on U.S. Senators to use the nomination process to highlight FERC’s rubber stamping of pipeline projects and refusal to listen the legitimate concerns of community groups. For the group sign-on statement and full list of signers go to https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScLFwOPKc3Qc85YrNVItTnK4n1FDhnPr_yex5PUqkFfeuRDwg/viewform.

FERC is the agency primarily responsible for reviewing applications for pipelines and conducting environmental assessments, and the agency has been increasingly criticized by local communities impacted by pipelines for its failure to take into account community concerns and independent environmental impact analyses documenting the risks.

Awareness of the dangers of pipeline construction has been heightened with the opposition to the Keystone XL and Dakota Access oil pipelines. These are just two of the dozens of pipelines nationwide that are being planned and constructed. The risks are clear: Over 1,000 pipeline accidents occurred between 2010 and 2015 across the U.S. Yet, FERC has rejected only one gas pipeline in 30 years, and relies extensively on the industry’s chosen experts for environmental impact data.

Beyond Extreme Energy, one of the groups coordinating the campaign to oppose Trump’s nominations to FERC, says they are exploring different ways to stop or delay the nominations, including through petition, call-in days to Senators, Senate office visits and rallies, and nonviolent civil disobedience.

“FERC serves the industry it supposedly regulates instead of the American public, and its rubber stamping of pipelines nationwide puts millions of people at risk,” said Todd Larsen, executive co-director of Green America. **“It is imperative that all Americans voice their opposition to business as usual at FERC and oppose any Trump nominees to the agency.”**

“FERC is abusing its powers and the law in how it reviews, approves, and greases the wheels for pipelines cutting through communities across America,” said Maya van Rossum, of the Delaware Riverkeeper and leader of the Delaware Riverkeeper Network. **“Given the level of harm pipelines inflict on communities, Congress should be working hard to prevent new nominations to the FERC commission in order to prevent restoration of the quorum they need to approve new pipelines, rather than working with President Trump to advance them.”**

“Five days ago, Pruitt’s EPA cancelled all the regulations on venting methane and dumping coal ash in streams,” said Maggie Henry, an anti-fracking activist from Lawrence County, Pennsylvania.

“Something must be done to stop the insanity and hold polluters accountable for devastating impacts on people lives and the environment.”

“It is important that Americans understand these pipelines are being used to export our resources, not for us to use them for our energy independence,” said Briget Shields, outreach director, Friends of the Harmed. **“I work with families who have been harmed by the extraction of fossil fuels. We need to stop promoting the O&G industry and start protecting the people and the future for our children. It's time to do away with FERC and fossil fuel expansion and invest in renewable safe energy.”**

“Pipelines promote and enable increased fracking, which puts our climate in peril,” said Heather Cantino, Athens County [Ohio] Fracking Action Network. **“With methane being 86 times more powerful a greenhouse gas than CO2 (at the 20-year time frame) and methane leakage at high rates unavoidable at all stages of production, fracking is worse for the climate than coal. There is no place for fracking in a livable future.”**

“Despite numerous conflicts of interest, strong evidence of harm, demands by Senators and the Governor, FERC permitted Spectra to build their ‘Algonquin’ Pipeline expansion only 105 feet from critical safety infrastructure at Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant.” said Dr. Courtney Williams, coordinator with Resist Spectra. **“This egregious disregard of public health and safety must be investigated and rectified before FERC is free to act again. We must not empower FERC to harm with impunity.”**

“We cannot allow this or any administration to hold the American people and the environment hostage while a handful of oil and gas billionaires develop an energy policy based on climate change denial,” said Tim Spiese, Lancaster Against Pipelines.

“At every step of the way, FERC has worked against efforts to protect people's health and safety from harms caused by the gas industry,” said Donny Williams, We Are Cove Point. **“FERC gave the go-ahead for a \$3.8 billion industrial behemoth to be built directly in our community, with homes as close as across the street. FERC allowed Dominion to use safety standards that were written when LNG export terminals didn't even exist in the US to help the company avoid the stringent review processes that are required by modern standards. The safety and well-being of people and ecosystems across this country are helped by FERC not being able to issue permits due to lack of a quorum.”**

“In our work to keep our communities healthy and safe from the Northeast Energy Direct proposed gas pipeline, we were continually affronted by the ways in which the FERC process looked like it might protect citizen and community interests, but always turned out to whitewash our concerns and favor industry,” said Becky Meier, Stop NY Fracked Gas Pipeline. **“It is a process which gives the illusion of fairness, but precludes real meaningful considerations. We were also dismayed that it gave Eminent Domain powers to private-for-profit pipeline corporations at the expense of private property landowners.”**

“The clear intent of the current administration to further disempower and block a truly independent regulatory review process, which gives proper weight to those most impacted by the permitting process and most at risk of decisions that do not weigh factors of environmental justice and human well-being, means appointments to fill vacancies on the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission need to be made by parties independent of the administration,” said Mark C. Johnson, executive director, The Center and Library for the Bible and Social Justice. **“A new way must open.”**

“Over the past few years, thanks to the efforts of environmental advocates and impacted citizens, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's willful disregard for the public it was charged with protecting has become one of Washington's worst-kept secrets,” said Karen Feridun, founder, Berks Gas Truth. **“The Senate has a rare opportunity to address the issues while the lack of a quorum has stopped the clock on the Commission's ability to make its reckless and devastating decisions. For the sake of our communities now and in the future, the Senate must act.”**

“The evidence is clear: fossil fuels put the health and well-being of workers and many communities at risk,” said Maureen McCue, Iowa Chapter Physicians for Social Responsibility. **“Extraction sites involve serious environmental damage and occupational risk. The health of those living along transport routes and pipelines, like those living near refineries is adversely affected; health impacts associated with fossil fuel induced climate change are complex and widespread. Fortunately, there are cleaner, healthier alternatives. Efficiency and clean fossil-free fuels like wind and solar bring well-paying jobs and minimal to no health or adverse environmental impacts. It's time to consider the real costs and benefits of our dependence on fossil fuels.”**

“To take more than we need and leave a ransacked world is not worthy of us as moral beings” said Cathy Strickler, Climate Action Alliance of the Valley. **“FERC must change.”**

“China, most of Europe, Japan, and even impoverished Island, Central American, and African nations have made substantial progress in transitioning off fossil fuel towards renewable energy,” said Ed Griffith, New Progressive Alliance. **“Thanks to FERC, however, the United States is not among the leaders. It matters not whether a Democrat or Republican is in the White House or which party controls congress, FERC acts as an irrational anchor to the past.”**

“What does it say about the tyranny of the pipeline profiteers who use eminent domain for private gain when just one pipeline, Energy Transfer's Rover, filed a recent lawsuit against resistant landowners with 258 pages of the complaint dedicated to the names of all the people who are being sued?” said Lea Harper, managing director, FreshWater Accountability Project. **“FERC is plundering human rights, and the antiquated Natural Gas Act is being used to destroy democracy in the U.S. for the sake of the multi-national investment community that cares nothing for our long-term environmental protection and economic prosperity.”**

“Faced with an onslaught of fossil fuel infrastructure buildout, environmental activists have stepped up their pressure on FERC over the past few years, but FERC has responded by digging in to reinforce their pro-industry stance,” said Stuart Anderson, Concerned Citizens of Otego NY. **“Despite overwhelming public opposition, FERC has almost invariably sided with the companies that they are supposed to regulate. We need regulators who understand that the damages done by the fossil fuel industries will haunt all humanity for decades to come.”**

“If even the former FERC chairman Bay recognizes that FERC is set to cause even more economic and environmental damage unless a different path is chosen, ‘...analyzing the downstream impacts of the use of natural gas and to performing a life-cycle greenhouse gas emissions study...,’ then we must insist on waiting for new commissioners who will manifest a much higher standard of environmental care,” said B. Arrindell, director of Damascus Citizens for Sustainability along the Delaware River

“New fossil fuel infrastructure, from extraction sites through pipelines, shipping lanes and railroads to refineries, locks us into decades of growing fossil fuel use,” said Janet Scoll Johnson, Sunflower Alliance. **“Such expansion means both additional global impacts of rising GHG emissions and worsening public health of front line communities. In defense of our communities and the future of life here on earth, Sunflower Alliance opposes all such projects.”**

"The Citizens' Climate Collaborative of North Carolina absolutely opposes the environmentally reckless permitting of gas and oil pipelines by FERC," said Tana Hartman Thorn, Citizens Climate Collaborative, North Carolina. **"The health of people and planet are infinitely more important than the profits of big energy investors."**

"We oppose the appointment of any and all commissioners to FERC until the agency establishes an Office of Public Participation," said Dave Elder, VerSE (Vestal Residents for Safe Energy).

"Congress passed a law in 1978 directing the agency to create such an office, but for almost 4 decades, FERC has refused to comply. The agency clearly does not care about how pipeline projects might hurt the public, as evidenced by its recent approval of a 42-inch high-pressure natural gas pipeline passing dangerously close to a nuclear power plant only 25 miles north of NYC. That project alone presents catastrophic risks for the entire NYC area, and demonstrates FERC's total lack of concern for public safety."

The pledge reads in full:

We understand that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, FERC, ignores and dismisses community and climate concerns when reviewing industry permits for fracked-gas pipelines and other infrastructure.

Research indicates that the agency has rejected ONLY ONE such application, in 2016, in 30 years. FERC is in essence a rubber-stamp agency for the fracked-gas industry.

Donald Trump will be able to nominate three Republican commissioners and one other commissioner to the five-member panel over the next six months, one of whom will be a new chair. There are now three vacancies, given the resignation of former chair Norman Bay in the last week of January, and one sitting commissioner's term expires in June.

Within just weeks, FERC could be controlled by Trump. As bad as things are now with FERC, they could get worse. All FERC-sponsored, open community meetings on proposed fracked-gas infrastructure projects could become one-person-at-a-time, behind-closed-door meetings, as has happened already under the current regime in Ohio, New York, New Jersey and Virginia. FERC could institute rigid, compressed timelines for action on permit applications. Landowners fighting eminent domain abuse could face greater pressure from pipeline companies anxious to take their land. FERC staff could be ordered to do even worse jobs on Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Statements that deal with threats to community health, safety and climate. The FERC public relations department could actively attempt to portray communities that oppose proposed pipelines in the most negative light. The FERC building security in DC could become more repressive against those who protest there.

Trump's nominations need to be approved by the full Senate. We call upon members of the Senate, especially those on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources committee which has to review those nominations, to speak out about the myriad problems with FERC and press Trump's nominees about its rubber-stamp history for gas industry expansion.

We pledge that when Trump makes his first FERC nomination we will work actively against it and the other nominations, as best and as much as we can, in collaboration with other organizations doing the same.

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