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Local Group Assails Governor's Pipeline Endorsement Urges Residents to Attend Saturday Community Meeting in Verona

Governor Terry McAuliffe ignored three months of strong public protest and overstated the economic benefits when he endorsed Dominion Power's proposed gas pipeline today, but local opponents plan to keep up their fight with a community information meeting September 6, said Augusta County Alliance Co-chair Nancy Sorrells of Greenville.

"We have been making a very strong case that construction of a huge, 42-inch transmission pipeline through Augusta County will actually harm our rural economic sectors due to the destructive impacts on our waterways, farms, forests and private and public lands," said Sorrells, a former county supervisor who represented the Riverheads District for two terms.

Current Augusta County Supervisor Tracy Pyles, representing the Pastures District, has scheduled a community meeting Saturday at 9 a.m. at the Augusta County Government Center in Verona to address these concerns, Sorrells said. The meeting will cover private property rights and legal issues, how pipeline construction impacts farms and farmers, drinking water and public lands, and the risks of building a 42-inch pipeline through Augusta's sensitive karst geology.

"Unfortunately many of the people elected to serve us are instead choosing to serve themselves. We have only ourselves to stop this money/power grab from happening. Please join us on Saturday as we 'Davids' prepare our slings and rocks for battle," noted Pyles.

Speakers at the community meeting will rebut claims by the governor and Dominion Power that the pipeline will have little impact and bring new jobs, taxes and energy for Augusta County, Sorrells said. The pipeline, from West Virginia to North Carolina, will not provide natural gas for Augusta County residents and businesses or lower local utility bills. Jobs for pipeline surveys, blasting, excavation and construction will go to journeymen professionals, not local workers, she added.

"Augusta County landowners may be compensated for the taking of property rights in the pipeline corridor," Sorrells said. "But they also will see a decrease in their property values due to restricted land uses and the visual damage of a 100-foot clear-cut." She added that these landowners may find it more difficult to sell their property, get a mortgage or obtain adequate insurance due to land use changes such as industrial development and danger of fire and explosion.

Farming is the top economic sector in Augusta County, which ranks second in the state in agricultural production, while tourism and recreation depend on the county's rich natural and historic resources. Dominion has sent letters to landowners seeking to survey two routes that would cut through prime farm lands that have been in families for generations and is also seeking to survey pristine areas within the George Washington National Forest, Sorrells said.

Augusta County Alliance, formed in July by residents opposed to the pipeline project, is dedicated to preserving the county's rural landscape and economy, clean air and water, and abundant wildlife habitat and historic resources.

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