

American News

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Our Voice

TransCanada should slow down process

Slow down and give us some respect. This is our message to TransCanada officials. TransCanada wants to build a 1,830-mile pipeline that would haul crude oil from Hardisty, Alberta, Canada, to Patoka, Ill., and, eventually, Cushing, Okla. The \$2.1 billion project would cut through the very western parts of Marshall and Day counties in northeast South Dakota. TransCanada wants to start work next year and have the pipeline finished by late 2009.

In July, we said the proposed TransCanada pipeline was a good idea and that it deserved public support. Our reasoning went something like this: Though in the wide spectrum of things one new pipeline is a small piece of the modern oil industry picture, we should remember that building a new pipeline is one way of increasing the infrastructure of the U.S. oil industry and decreasing our reliance on Mideast oil.

We also said that there were concerns ranging from environmental to quality of life and many, many areas in between. We hoped that the concerns would be thoroughly addressed and resolved.

That didn't happen. Instead, TransCanada began pushing its plan through the state like the proverbial bull in the china closet.

Though we still support the overall purpose of the project, we have a problem with the way it is being implemented — and the way in which state and company officials are handling it.

First, company officials announced that TransCanada would be using a different type of pipeline than was originally planned; a less expensive, thinner pipe — with a slightly lower safety factor.

Company officials claim there are never any problems, and that citizens shouldn't worry. Well, pat answers that include words like "never" and "always" have a tendency to throw up red flags — and they should.

This is all perfectly legal and as been approved by the federal Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, but it still begs the question: Why? Was South Dakota chosen because we are a rural, relatively poor, sparsely populated state that wouldn't put up too much of a fight?

Here's another concern: State officials have been uncharacteristically quiet about this whole process — and not nearly as protective of the interests of this state's citizens and environment as they should be. We are not aware of a single state official who publicly questioned the lower quality pipe.

And then there is the issue of eminent domain. South Dakota hasn't even officially approved the pipeline yet, and TransCanada is already pushing eminent domain lawsuits on landowners who are reluctant to give permanent easements for the pipeline to go under their land.

Many South Dakotans would like to see TransCanada pursue the I-29 bypass option. But a project consultant said TransCanada never considered running the pipeline down the Interstate 29 corridor because such a route wouldn't be allowed for safety reasons.

So we are just supposed to ignore safety considerations, sign the easements and pray everything goes OK, because TransCanada says so? We think not.

Maybe what TransCanada really needs right now is a good public relations firm to address the issues, not lawyers to file lawsuits.

And what South Dakotans need right now are state officials who are willing to step up to the plate to make sure the state's interests are protected.

South Dakotans need — and deserve — more respect and consideration than this company is giving. South Dakotans also need — and deserve — more support and advocacy than we are getting from our state officials.