

From: Sara [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, August 8, 2023 2:45 PM
To: PUC <PUCPF@state.sd.us>
Subject: Re: [EXT] FW: Open Letter to the SD PUC

HP22-002 - In the Matter of the Application of Navigator Heartland Greenway, LLC for a Permit Under The South Dakota Energy Conversion and Transmission Facilities Act to Construct the Heartland Greenway Pipeline in South Dakota

Sara Steever
[REDACTED]

Lennox, SD
57039
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Second-Class Silenced – An Open Letter to the SD PUC

August 8, 2023

Commissioners Fiegen, Hanson and Nelson,

There's a subtle caste system in our state, and it's manifesting itself during the PUC's Navigator Heartland Greenway pipeline hearings. These hearings are grueling for everyone involved: the PUC, the pipeline company, the expert witnesses, the attorneys, and finally the landowners themselves.

Because this is an open letter, it's worth saying to the unfamiliar that these pipeline hearings are not like a typical city or county commission meeting where regular folks have a chance to express their opinions then wait quietly for an outcome. The pipeline hearings are more like a trial, complete with rigorous cross examination. Rigorous enough that regular folks find themselves quite out of their element. And they are out of their element, because before private, for-profit pipeline companies decided they wanted their land, these landowners' lives never included testifying in public for the defense of a way of life rooted in what they thought were their inalienable rights.

But, here they are, the unlucky ones in the pipeline's path, who now must defend (at great expense) the land passed to them by ancestors, or earned by sweat, blood and risk-taking. Or both.

And that's where the caste system shakes out. Landowners wait for days for their turn to testify, because they must wait until the out-of-order, polished, practiced experts have had their say. Stunned that most elected officials have hot-potatoed the issue, they write and rewrite their words, trying to compress the weight of generations and decades into a few moments of cotton-mouthed sentences to save their land.

Even though they return day after day, waiting for their opportunity to speak, landowner testimony is repetitive, and so many of them all say the same thing. Somehow, the sheer number of landowners in agreement with one another carries even less weight than if there was only one.

So, landowners are asked to just stick to the facts, and not get emotional about having their land stolen and their rights expunged. And shorten it to two minutes please because the expert rebuttal witnesses from out of state need extra time. And be prepared for the cross examination, because as it turns out, as a landowner, it is going to feel as if you are on trial. After landowner and Representative Karla Lems was cross-examined for hours, some intervenor landowners were too intimidated to testify. That's what passes for justice in a caste state.

Here's what else passes in our state. Carpetbagging grifters take our tax money to pay for attorneys to condemn and take land from farmers and landowners who don't want the pipeline. The pipeline easements they want are permanent and the pipelines are proven dangerous.

Our South Dakota landowners and farmers are not second-class citizens! They deserve to have their voices heard in full, and their rights respected. Commissioners of the PUC, we know this is exhausting for all parties involved, but every landowner's voice deserves to be heard.

Sincerely,
Sara Steever
Lincoln County Resident