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Congresswoman Tsongas – FERC Scoping Meeting Statement

August 11, 2015 – Dracut, MA

First, I would like to thank you for hosting this scoping meeting in my district today and I hope it is the first of several opportunities for the constituents I represent to provide their input.

I recognize FERC's challenging responsibility to ensure that our energy system is reliable and to minimize natural resource degradation in the face of a quickly changing energy market. Constituents and businesses across Massachusetts have had trouble absorbing the increasing cost of energy. And, there is agreement that the best solution to New England's energy issues will be through careful, long-term planning with significant public input. Meetings like this begin to provide the public with that opportunity.

I also appreciate the opportunity to continue my office's dialogue with FERC and to share directly with you some of the foremost concerns brought to me by my constituents, hundreds of whom have contacted me about this proposal, concerns that I share and believe must be taken seriously by the regulators reviewing this proposal.

As I am sure you will hear tonight, there are many concerns with the impact this proposed pipeline will have on the environment and the surrounding ecology. My constituents and I have worked hard to preserve our diverse and historic Massachusetts landscape and I value this long determined effort, shared by so many of the communities I represent, so that future generations can enjoy our treasured landscape well into the future. We must protect our historic farmland as it is rooted in New England's character, heritage, and economy; being both an important source of income for local families and integral to the historic New England landscape. Environmental protections should be held to the strictest of standards for this proposed project. We know how precious and vital our wetlands, state and local conservation land, threatened and vulnerable species, and watersheds are to our own quality of life and the ecology surrounding us. A lesson hard learned from New England's industrial past. We have made significant progress cleaning up our rivers and restoring habitats. To see this work regress would be devastating. Questions such as, Does drilling a pipeline crossing rivers such as the Nashua River, currently being studied for Wild & Scenic status by the Department of Interior, agitate settled pollutants? How will farmers be compensated for loss of future crop production? And, how temporary is "minimal impact"? These questions should be thoroughly explored.

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Homeowners are understandably concerned with how the pipeline might affect individual property values. A house is an investment for one's family and for a future generation. As pipelines and compressor stations are sited near residences, how will homeowners be compensated for potential loss in property value even if their property is not directly impacted? I have heard the very reasonable concern that property owners both directly and indirectly impacted by the construction and route of the pipeline may see the value of their property decrease, only to see the gas ultimately moving through the pipeline exported overseas, with no benefit to the community serving as its host. How is a community compensated for loss in property value, especially when they are not serviced by natural gas but are simply hosting a portion of the mainline? How will FERC know the company has made every effort to avoid utilizing eminent domain? How will public need be determined if there is the slightest potential to export natural gas?

Residents are concerned with the public safety risks from potential accidents, a reality we must confront with honesty and transparency. While remote technology has improved dramatically in the last few decades, can residents living near a remotely manned compressor station feel at ease? What measures will be taken to ensure that disruption of the ground while drilling, blasting, and laying pipe will not negatively affect the wells that so many of my constituents depend on for drinking water? Will there be constant monitoring of the groundwater in residential areas that depend on wells? Do we understand the long-term impacts of living in proximity to a compressor station?

I have also heard concerns regarding the process with which this project has proceeded. Contact with local town officials best able to identify local concerns has not gone as smoothly as desired. For example, local officials were not the first parties contacted, but instead discovered an energy company was proposing to build a massive infrastructure project from their own constituents. There have also been many concerns with the speed with which public meetings have been scheduled without providing complete Resource Reports in advance. For example, in the most recent release, thousands of "To Be Determineds" were noted throughout the report. As is the case with very large infrastructure projects there will be constantly changing information and this process is in the early stages, however, I fail to see how my constituents can comment as informed citizens with so many unknowns.

Additionally, I would like to ask that FERC consider viewing the numerous natural gas pipeline projects pending or approved in the New England region in a holistic manner to ensure that we are not overbuilding our pipeline infrastructure for domestic need. As a country, we have made a commitment to building a renewable future and not reducing the competitiveness of solar, wind, hydropower, and other alternative sources in favor of additional pipeline infrastructure. Accordingly, would FERC consider a "no-build" option, instead considering the option to repair our existing pipeline infrastructure to answer our region's energy needs?

Also, knowing that the Massachusetts Attorney General's office is conducting a study to determine regional pipeline infrastructure need, to be released in October 2015, I ask in advance that this study be given consideration in FERC's decision.

I respectfully request consideration of these questions raised by my constituents closely and carefully before deciding. And, I would like to request additional FERC scoping meetings to be held in the early months of fall in locations that have not yet hosted scoping meetings to give my constituents further opportunities to review and provide input on this project. Thank you again, FERC, for hosting these scoping sessions and providing me with this opportunity to present the concerns my constituents have brought to me.

I look forward to your responses and to continuing this dialogue on behalf of the Third Congressional District.