

All eyes on North Dakota —full story isn't being told

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The increasing coverage of the Dakota Access pipeline has led many national news outlets to travel to North Dakota. Unfortunately, too much of that press coverage has focused on a narrow sliver of the Great Plains populace. There are others here who are worried that our voices are not being heard — I am one of them.

Throughout the Midwest and country there is an opportunity to embrace energy independence and chart our own path toward economic growth. By constructing the Dakota Access Pipeline the states of North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, and Illinois gain as many as 12,000 local jobs, \$129 million in tax revenues, and access to an invaluable American-produced natural resource. It was the benefits of this project to millions of people throughout our region, and throughout the country that gave the North Dakota Public Service Commission, South Dakota Public Utilities Commission, Iowa Utilities Board, and Illinois Commerce Commission rationale to approve this project and legally allow it to be constructed.

But now the future of this project is jeopardized by national environmental groups that have latched onto a Native American protest as a last-ditch effort to stop a project that they could not prevent through a regular, orderly review process. These actions attempt to disrupt the very rule of law that was established by these state regulatory organizations.

In North Dakota, and now Washington, D.C., Native American groups and their environmental activist allies are attempting to roll back progress of the pipeline through illegal occupation of construction sites, intimidating and threatening law enforcement and construction workers, shutting down public highways, and demonstrating in front of public buildings. Despite the fact that these groups did not take part in the review process of the project, including three public hearings held in North Dakota by the Public Service Commission, there is now a halt to construction at the pipeline site crossing the Missouri River.

The North Dakota Petroleum Council fully supports projects like Dakota Access, which will greatly contribute to our energy independence. Increasing access to American-produced crude oil has already done much to lower energy prices in North Dakota and across the country, reducing overhead costs for many businesses and decreasing reliance on foreign energy products. However, we need to examine all methods available when it comes to transporting our domestic resources — pipelines included.

Opposition to Dakota Access, then, is no longer simply opposition to an energy project. Because it has been approved by both state and federal regulators, these groups are disrupting construction after having failed to stop the project under the standard regulatory process. Further, this project is anything but dangerous. This is a state-of-the-art infrastructure project that is arguably the biggest North Dakota infrastructure project since the Garrison Dam. It will have the latest technologies and monitoring systems to help prevent releases and will be constructed 90 feet below the riverbed to ensure nothing may reach the river — far above and beyond what's required by federal regulations.

Protesters and parties to the lawsuits have effectively declared that the laws of their states and the United States do not work for them, and are now attempting to assert themselves against those laws both in the courtroom and in public protest. There was a time and a place to discuss the merits of this pipeline project. The rules matter. It is beyond time to allow construction to continue.

Ron Ness is president of the North Dakota Petroleum Council.