

Science, law should prevail in DAPL approval

The debate over the Dakota Access Pipeline has become one that is centered almost entirely on emotion and politics rather than reason, logic or science, as was proven earlier this month when President Barack Obama refused to grant operators the final easement required to complete the project.

That decision marked a disturbing day for America because it endorsed the fact that lawless, intimidating and terrorist behavior can be rewarded.

But this decision doesn't change the facts. These are facts that have gone largely ignored, and there are many, many people who simply want straight-to-the-matter answers. We field many of these questions, and some individuals even offer advice or opinions:

"Why not make the pipeline extra thick?"

"Could the company monitor the pipeline regularly?"

"Maybe it should follow in the path of existing infrastructure off the reservation?"

Our answer to these questions, which are a simple "It is" or "It does," leaves many of these inquiring and eager-to-learn individuals shocked. "Why isn't this information being shared?" they'll ask.

The information has been shared, but all too often it is drowned out by the drama and emotion that have engulfed this discussion. It is time to bring these facts to the forefront.

Among the facts often ignored is the siting of the pipeline. It is a common misconception that the pipeline was originally slated to run north of Bismarck, but was changed because the "people of Bismarck didn't want it." This was not the case.

The pipeline was never a serious option for the people of Bismarck to even consider because there were too many parameters that made it an unviable option, including the fact that it would have been 11 miles longer, crossed 33 additional waterways, affected 48 miles of "greenfield" or undeveloped lands and been nearly impossible to build because of the North Dakota Public Service Commission's requirement that a utility not be within 500 feet of a dwelling.

In addition, it is preferred that new infrastructure run along the same corridor as existing infrastructure, otherwise known as "brownfield."

So, a better alternative seemed to be to follow the present route of a natural gas pipeline built in 1982 and a high voltage transmission line—the route that was ultimately chosen.

The decision had nothing to do with race. It had nothing to do with money. It had everything to do with minimizing the impact to land, which has been a major goal of the industry for more than a decade.

Additionally, because it ran along the same route as existing infrastructure (areas that have already been cleared not once, but twice) it drastically decreased the chances that cultural artifacts would be disturbed.

Even then, Energy Transfer Partners was diligent in surveying the route to ensure that cultural artifacts were not disturbed.

To suggest that discrimination played into the route decision lacks all logic. The pipeline crosses the Missouri once 14 miles upstream from Williston's water intake, and it will also cross several other rivers and streams along the route, including the Big Sioux River near Sioux Falls, S.D., the Des Moines River in Iowa and the Mississippi River.

These resources are important, which is why ETP also went above and beyond the state and federal requirements to ensure that our land and water resources would be protected in the unlikely case of a mishap.

At the Missouri River crossing in Morton County, N.D., specifically, the pipe will be 92 feet below the riverbed, which is 88 feet more than what the federal government requires.

Gravity alone dictates that any leaks will not make it near the river, but despite that, ETP planned for additional safety features, including extra-thick steel and double walls to help prevent corrosion and mitigate any possible leaks. It will also have shut-off valves on both sides of the river so that if state-of-the-art monitoring technology senses even the slightest change in pressure, the section will be shut down until it can be inspected and repaired.

The pipeline will be monitored 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year by full-time operations maintenance staff including aerial inspections

every 10 days, which is more than the federal requirement of just 26 times per year.

This pipeline truly will be among the most advanced in our nation. And should an incident occur, stringent regulations ensure that the company takes responsibility to remediate and reclaim land at their own expense.

Most important, this is a legal pipeline that followed all the rules and regulatory process for permitting. This is admitted by the Army Corps of Engineers that approved the permit and recommended to Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works Jo-Ellen Darcy that the easement be granted. It is confirmed by Standing Rock Tribal Chairman, who is quoted as saying, "That pipeline had every right to go through." And it was confirmed by four federal judges.

Many facts have been ignored in the argument for this pipeline. Those who truly want the facts can visit www.ndoilcan.com/dapl for a list of this and other information with sources.

We only hope that calmer heads may soon prevail, and we can return to the North Dakota way where we come together to work toward solutions and progress for our state.