

OPINION

COMMENTARY, LETTERS AND VIEWPOINTS FROM THE HOUSTON BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Time to go, protesters: Stop messing with Texas progress

As Texas Land Commissioner and the elected head of the General Land Office, my job is to generate income from state land and mineral resources that are constitutionally dedicated to funding public education, provide veteran's benefits through the Texas Veterans Land Board and protect the environment associated with state-owned land, particularly along the Texas Coast.



GUEST COMMENTARY
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JERRY PATTERSON

In fact, mine is the oldest continuously existing office in Texas government, having been established in 1836.

I've recently learned that a bunch of out-of-state, self-appointed "eco-anarchists" think they know better than Texans, and have arrived to save us from ourselves. They're trying to block the Keystone Pipeline Gulf Coast Project, the pipeline under construction in East Texas that will create thousands of jobs and lessen our dependence on foreign oil.

Fortunately, they're not succeeding. The only thing they've managed to do so far is get arrested and waste the time and resources of local law enforcement officers. They have also generated publicity for a clueless Hollywood actress who was recently arrested, and thanks to her mug shot, probably received more press than she's received since she played a mermaid in a movie a couple of decades ago.

The protesters are under the misguided notion that they know better than Texans about what's good for Texas. They don't.

Their scare tactics and misinformation won't work in Texas. Gangs of tree sitters who trespass and defecate on landowners' property don't understand Texas values and culture. Their antics aren't going to convince Texans to "rise up" and abandon our energy industry, an industry that has made this state the economic envy of the United States.

If anything, they're going to con-

vince most Texans to tell them to shut up and go home.

TransCanada has worked responsibly to ensure it has the legal authority and regulatory approval needed to build the pipeline and will diligently work to restore property to its original condition. Along the way, the company has treated Texas landowners with integrity and respect, which is more than I can say about the protesters and their trespassing, tree-climbing, drum-beating antics.

Like all Texans, I expect TransCanada to meet high expectations regarding environmental and safety standards. As an elected steward of the land, a proponent of responsible energy production and an advocate for private property rights, I expect TransCanada to continue to treat landowners fairly and respectfully.

Texas is a proud leader in the development and transportation of oil and gas in a safe and environmentally responsible manner. As part of the Keystone Pipeline System, the Gulf Coast Project will be constructed using industry-best practices and will meet or exceed all regulatory standards. TransCanada also has agreed to meet 57 additional safety and operating standards above and beyond existing codes.

One last point: If you think these folks are motivated by private property rights, think again. They are simply part of the environmental lunatic fringe that hates the oil and gas industry and is attempting to co-opt their message using the private property rights tradition that Texans hold dear. If you don't believe me, go to their website: tarsandsblockade.org.

Given all those indisputable facts, it's time for the protesters to come down out of the trees, take a bath and hit the road.

JERRY PATTERSON, a former state senator, is Texas Land Commissioner.



Companies must build trust to secure country's energy future

While the presidential candidates debate how to achieve energy independence, the real issue, some experts say, is whether the U.S. can achieve energy security or access to stable supplies at reasonable prices.

Either way, don't overlook the necessary public support for pursuing and transporting domestic energy supplies.

Fueling the debate on energy independence versus security is the dramatic increase in domestic oil and gas supplies, courtesy of horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing.

Texas Railroad Commission Chairman Barry Smitherman recently told an audience in Houston that energy independence may finally be within our grasp. He said that in less than 10 years, Texas could produce as much crude oil as the U.S. currently imports from all foreign countries, except Canada.

Yet that incredible scenario was not the headline in one daily newspaper, perhaps because that's old news to many readers. Rather, the story's lead was about how the Texas Legislature, responding to landowner complaints, may intervene next year on where a pipeline is built in East Texas.

And therein lies an overlooked factor within the debate between energy independence and security: They both presume robust public support for accessing domestic energy supplies.

In the energy capital of the world, even hydrocarbon-friendly Texans have concerns about fracking. The climate in Texas is not the same as the last oil rush in the 1970s or prior.

In fact, the concerns of Texans over energy infrastructure aren't too different from those of middle-class landowners in northwest North Dakota, affluent suburbanites in Albuquerque or struggling inner-city residents in Washington, D.C. Whether the energy supply being proposed is conven-

tional or an alternative like hydrogen, my experience has been that concerns among dispersed Americans are eerily similar: safety, economic (i.e. property values), the environment and quality of life (e.g., visual footprint, noise and light).

America's energy future is linked to corporate America's ability to address

these concerns satisfactorily so as to earn a license to build and operate energy infrastructure. It was in the spirit of transparency, I suspect, that famed oilman George Mitchell wrote earlier this year that "all responsible producers should be willing to fully disclose to regulators and to the public the exact chemical composition of hydraulic fracturing fluids being pushed down any well, the precise composition of what comes back up, and the nature of its disposal."

I believe that at the end of the day it comes down to trust and whether personal relationships are built between a company and its affected stakeholders — sometimes one at a time. I'll never forget the discussion one night at a family's kitchen table, miles from nowhere, about a proposed project to be located 400 yards or so outside their living room window. The talk was as much about quality hunting rifles as the project, but barriers of suspicion were lowered and initial bonds of trust were established.

The landowner did not welcome his new industrial neighbor with open arms, but his continued opposition was not as vociferous as it otherwise could have been.

Time and resources spent on stakeholder engagement will not guarantee a new energy project's success, but the absence of these investments will surely increase the likelihood of failure. ■

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