

Plant project foes escorted from commission meeting

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Washington, DC – Thursday morning, March 19, singing and chanting members of We Are Cove Point (WACP) from Lusby and their supporters from Beyond Energy (BXE) attempted to sit in and read a statement at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (FERC) monthly meeting, protesting FERC's failure to rule on a Request for Rehearing of its Sept. 29, 2014 order approving Dominion Resource's construction permit for Cove Point even while construction at the hotly-challenged site continues. They were immediately removed from the building and the doors were locked behind them.

The prepared statement read:

You are continuing to allow Dominion to proceed with construction while simultaneously asking for a lot of new information from them—why didn't you ask for this before you granted the permit in the first place? You are taking months to rule on local residents' request for a rehearing. You are refusing to rule on a request from their legal team to stay all construction while FERC considers their request for a rehearing. The combined result of this is that Dominion gets to continue construction for many months before the case gets heard at the Court of Appeals.

The community groups and their supporters also presented FERC with a petition – supported by nearly 20,000 signatures – demanding that FERC order construction at Cove Point to stop while the agency considers the health, safety, and legal issues raised by the Application For Rehearing, which was filed by Earth Justice and when granted would invalidate the permit – bringing the Cove Point project to a halt.

Today's protest at FERC is the latest in a series of continuing and escalating community protests at FERC's monthly meetings. The protests have led FERC Chair Cheryl LaFleur to declare, "We have a situation here." FERC has also issued a gag rule to silence these protestors. (The rule was imposed in early March, but will not go into effect until 30 days after publication in the Federal Register.)

As to the gag rule, BXE says:

FERC must get its priorities straight – beginning with stopping construction at Cove Point. It is outrageous that FERC cares more about suppressing citizen protests – which are necessary because of its failure to act – than it does about acting promptly to protect the health and safety of the communities in and around Cove Point. FERC must no longer be the first line of defense for the fossil fuel industries in setting energy policy.

BXE will continue to bring these concerns to the commission, and emphasized that concerned citizens and communities will not be silenced by an industry-friendly gag rule.

BXE has also called for large-scale non-violent direct action later this spring to protest FERC's arbitrary, secretive and industry-friendly policies. Hundreds of concerned citizens, families, and community groups will converge on FERC to demand that the agency "Stop the FERCus" by turning FERC's natural gas policy around and opening up a clean, renewable energy future.

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