

## Vote Indicates County's Opposition to Pipeline

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O'NEILL — No tar sands pipeline. No crude oil pipeline.

That was the unanimous sentiment of the Holt County Supervisors during Tuesday's meeting at the Holt County Courthouse here even as a decision by the U.S. State Department on the controversial Keystone XL pipeline looms.

With their vote, the supervisors were the first to pass a resolution against these types of pipelines traversing their county's borders, although at least one Nebraska county previously passed a resolution in support of such pipelines.

All seven supervisors voted to approve a resolution opposing all crude oil and tar sands pipelines across Holt County after listening to comments from landowners and representatives of TransCanada, the company seeking to build and operate the Keystone XL pipeline.

Supervisor Chairman Bill Tielke acknowledged the vote may be nothing more than a symbolic gesture.

"Whatever is decided in Washington, D.C., will happen, but our citizens have concerns and we are addressing it," Tielke said during a break in the meeting.

Jeff Rauh, a TransCanada representative, presented a three-page letter to supervisors, outlining the process the Canada-based project has gone through, including independent regulatory reviews and state and federal environmental impact hearings.

Property taxes generated from the pipeline could result in a \$3 million windfall for the county, Rauh said, benefiting both Atkinson-West Holt and O'Neill Public Schools.

But Bob Beelaert of Page said supervisors need to represent the sentiments of Holt County taxpayers, and not TransCanada.

"If we're talking money, most will write a check to cover the money if it means no pipeline," Beelaert said.

Supervisor Ralph Metschke of Chambers agreed. "It's not about money. It's about clean water," Metschke said.

A large contingency of Holt County landowners — some affected by the proposed route — addressed the board individually. Concerns surfaced about possible leaks, the possible effect on the Ogallala Aquifer and liability for clean-up.

“TransCanada has agreed to go above and beyond required safety measures. Our objective is to make sure the pipeline is safe,” said Rauh.

Rancher Bruce Boettcher of Atkinson said opposition to the proposed pipeline’s route is growing in Nebraska.

“This county has stepped up to the plate,” Boettcher said.

The Holt County vote came as Nebraska law enforcement officials met last week with TransCanada representatives.

The meeting addressed expected public demonstrations against the project — if it's eventually approved and built in the state.

Several sheriffs said the meeting was set up by the Nebraska State Patrol as a way to plan for what could turn into heated confrontations between construction crews and opponents.

Jane Kleeb, the leader of pipeline opposition group Bold Nebraska, criticized the meeting and said she understood that TransCanada is seeking to hire off-duty officers to work as security guards.

"That's a conflict of interest," she said. "Are they working for our citizens or are they working for TransCanada?"

The meeting was set up by the patrol and was open to police and sheriff's agencies along the pipeline route. The Nebraska Attorney General's office sent a representative, as did some county prosecutors.

Sheriffs of three counties along the route confirmed when contacted Tuesday that they attended the meeting.

The company was invited to offer examples of the kinds of protests and demonstrations they've encountered in Texas, where the southern leg of the project is under construction.

The information was welcome for counties that don't often see demonstrations, said Antelope County Sheriff Robert Moore.

"We talked about the fine line between peaceful and what crosses the line and makes it a criminal," he said.

Sheriff Cory Beverly of Boyd County, who also attended the meeting, said its purpose was to share information to help departments better protect public safety.

Howard, the company spokesman, declined to say what the company plans to do specifically to protect construction crews. But he did not rule out the possibility that the company may try to hire off-duty police in Nebraska.

"It would be great if we didn't have to," he said.

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