

120116 Testimony for the People's Hearing

My name is Patrick Robbins; I am the Co-Director of Sane Energy Project, a New York City based climate advocacy group that is dedicated to a socially just transition away from fossil fuels toward a fully renewable energy system. It is a privilege to be here today with so many courageous people from so many parts of the country.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission is a disgrace. The very idea of government oversight is based on the simple principle that certain common goods are too important to be exploited or degraded for private profit. If anything, FERC does the opposite by facilitating the destruction of the commons by rubber stamping disastrous gas infrastructure projects and looking the other way as companies trample public resources.

When Spectra Energy proposed its AIM Pipeline to run right through a county park, the beautiful and ecologically sensitive Blue Mountain Reservation in Westchester County New York, FERC said fine. When a local official, the corrupt Westchester County Executive Rob Astorino – who, by the way, received \$43,000 for his reelection bid from a business partner of Spectra Energy – when Astorino circumvented the standard parkland alienation process, which would have allowed the Legislature to have a say and allowed for greater public input on Spectra's proposal, FERC said okay. And when Spectra Energy illegally dredged a wetland in order to find a drillbit that they lost during their attempt to drill under the Hudson River, FERC basically said that as long as Spectra was sorry and promised never to do it again, this too was acceptable. This is not okay. Regulatory agencies are supposed to protect the interests and the resources that belong to the people. By trampling on these resources and shutting people out of the decision making process, this is not just inappropriate behavior for a regulatory agency. It is an attack on the idea of the public good.

Maybe the most dire threat to the public good right now is climate change. We know that climate change is already leading to mass extinction, social upheaval, and widespread misery in places where flash floods, droughts or forest fires are becoming the new normal. That's why the White House Council on Environmental Quality released a guidance in August 2016 for all federal agencies to consider climate impacts in their NEPA review processes, and to consider alternatives. Alternatives to fossil fuels are abundant; in Massachusetts, for example, Attorney General Maura Healy commissioned a study that found all their projected demand growth for energy could be met through energy efficiency measures and demand response technology. Yet FERC continues to grant permits for fossil fuel pipelines across the country, even in the face of these alternatives. This violates the CEQ guidance on climate change, certainly. But it also demonstrates how deep FERC's contempt for the public good really runs, that they would disregard the clear guidance of the highest office in the country, the will of the people, and ultimately the stability of our common climate in order to turn a profit for private companies. This is why I'm here to support a full congressional hearing and reexamination of FERC's authority under the Natural Gas Act. I believe in the public good. I believe that right now especially it is an idea that must be defended, and I'm here to say that if FERC won't do it, we will. Thank you.