



P.O. Box 1065
Charlottesville, VA 22902
(434) 971-1553
www.wildvirginia.org

For Immediate Release

Governor McAuliffe's Information "Coordination" Pipeline News Filtered Clean?

The *Roanoke Times*, reported that the McAuliffe Administration called state natural resources officials in for a talking-to about their disclosures on the controversial Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley Pipelines.¹ From that account, it appears that this Governor, who promised an era of transparency in state government under his rule, has decided information on these pipelines needs to be filtered prior to public distribution.

According to the *Times* article, state agencies were commanded to brief the Governor's office before employees comment publicly about proposed pipeline projects. Administration spokespeople say this is just an attempt to ensure coordinated communications between different parts of state government. However, placing an embargo on the release of information by public servants in state government until they run their statements by the Governor raises serious questions about the openness of our government. It places into question the motives of a Governor who came out in support of these huge and disruptive projects before he could have any idea of the impacts they would have on Virginia's communities and environment.

We all understand that governors set political and policy positions for their administrations and that they want those positions to be clearly presented to the public. Governor McAuliffe has expressed his support for these natural gas pipelines arm-in-arm with power company officials. "Governor McAuliffe's statement of political support for the wishes of the power companies cannot and must not be allowed to color the scientific, technical, and regulatory findings and communications of agencies that are legally and ethically bound to review the proposals objectively and openly," said David Sligh, Conservation Director of Wild Virginia. "We fear that this move to 'coordinate' messages could be an attempt to limit the type and amount of information we are given."

Sligh continued, "State scientists who are assessing the possible impacts of these pipelines must be able to disclose their findings and exchange information, whether those findings support the Governor's political stance or not. Likewise, regulators must be free to interpret laws and regulations and inform the public of their judgments without interference. This is the normal process followed on thousands of issues before state government every day.

¹Roanoke Times, [Governor's office to coordinate state agency comments about pipeline projects](http://m.roanoke.com/news/local/governor-s-office-to-coordinate-state-agency-comments-about-pipeline/article_a2a33d0c-f826-54c5-9a0c-ed666112ba2d.html?mode=iqm), *Roanoke Times*, by Duncan Adams, posted Nov. 3, 2015, http://m.roanoke.com/news/local/governor-s-office-to-coordinate-state-agency-comments-about-pipeline/article_a2a33d0c-f826-54c5-9a0c-ed666112ba2d.html?mode=iqm

Requiring pre-clearance of agency information by the Governor's office is not required in those cases. We assert that these pipelines should be handled in the same manner."

"If water quality, fish and game scientists, foresters, and geologists conclude that these destructive pipeline projects will damage our mountains, forests, and waterbodies, as we believe they must, will their reports be left intact when they leave the confines of the Governor's office?" inquired Ernie Reed, Wild Virginia's President. "If the pipelines cannot be built in accordance with state and federal laws, which the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and other agencies administer, how will the public know if the Governor censors the data?"

"It is falling to the citizens of Virginia to hold power companies like Dominion accountable and the public cannot do this if the Governor decides what information to make public and what actions state agencies may take," said Reed.

The Governor has stated that he wants the pipelines to be built "in a way . . . that is not intrusive to our beautiful environment," and that protects property rights.² Comments submitted by the United States Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission have criticized Dominion and Next Era/EQT for their incomplete and inconsistent data.

"Even if the Governor filters the data to fit his message," said Reed, "he can't change the reality of the impacts of these destructive and unnecessary projects."

Wild Virginia calls on the Governor to reverse his order to funnel all public information about the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and the Mountain Valley Pipeline through his office and to make sure that the state's process is conducted in the kind of transparent manner that he has promised.

Wild Virginia is a non-profit organization, based in Charlottesville, that works on behalf of its members and the general public to preserve Virginia's forests and irreplaceable natural treasures.

Contacts:

David Sligh
Conservation Director
434-964-7455
david@wildvirginia.org

Ernie Reed
President
434-971-1647
lec@wildvirginia.org

²McAuliffe says pipeline must protect the environment, Richmond Times Dispatch, by Jim Nolan, April 30, 2015, http://www.richmond.com/news/virginia/article_ff87d0f8-f340-5903-8c96-9f495b046b09.html.