

Dear Ms. Monroe;

I strongly agree with this suggestion from Kris Pastoriza. The handling of questions from the public in the SEC public hearings for Northern Pass (NP) has seriously eroded the public's faith in the objectivity of SEC.

From my own experience, when the SEC meeting Chairman started reading one of my questions, he stopped mid-sentence, started chuckling, and stated to NP's Mr. Quinlan that "this is a loaded question". The two of them chuckled together about having received a "loaded question" from the public, and then the SEC meeting chairman proceeded to paraphrase my question, leaving out critical points, and reducing it to a softball question, to which Mr. Quinlan responded with his usual, repetitive talking points. I felt that SEC had colluded with NP to disregard my question, and an opportunity to elicit useful information from NP had been purposely suppressed by SEC.

Yes, I submitted a "loaded" question. I thought that was the whole point of a public hearing! Let's face it, the material that NP have submitted with their application is heavily biased and raises more questions than it answers, for abutters, and for the general public. These public hearings are the one opportunity in the SEC proceedings for the general public to get some answers from NP. We are most certainly there to ask probing questions, because we want better and more balanced information, and we believe SEC should also have far better information on which to base their decision.

In my and others' experience at these hearings, our questions have been paraphrased, shortened, key points have been skipped over, and in some cases our duly submitted questions have been completely ignored. The SEC meeting chairman, by his behavior, has made it clear that he considers it his role to rush through the Q&A process in a perfunctory manner, and to shield NP from hard questions. This would certainly not be his role in an objective process. The whole Q&A process gives a strong impression of collusion between SEC and NP to disrespect and suppress public participation.

Another major weakness in the Q&A process is the fact that NP is free to dodge any question. When Mr. Quinlan sidesteps the key point of a question and slips into his talking points, the SEC meeting chairman makes no effort to bring Mr. Quinlan back to the question at hand, or insist on a direct answer. The public has seen many of their questions dodged and avoided. Again, the opportunity to elicit useful information from NP is lost in this way. If the meeting chairman is not going to insist that NP answers each question directly, then the chairman needs to allow the author of each question to stand up and ask a follow-up question, so that NP can be required to provide a direct answer to each question asked.

The Q&A process as it is currently handled does not fulfill the statutory spirit or intent for these sessions, and leaves the public feeling disenfranchised. I therefore support Kris Pastoriza's suggestion of an independent moderator to handle the Q&A process at future public hearings. Thank you for your consideration.

Walter Palmer
Franconia