Responding to Mr. Cavanagh’s comments concerning the compressor Station in Rehoboth

Mr. Cavanagh,

I applaud you for writing into the Reporter with your responses to my 6/24 letter on the topic of Spectra Energy’s gas pipeline expansion and compressor station planned for our town. This is a big issue, it will affect the future of our town, our wallets, and how we will source our energy needs for years to come. Your comments are appreciated, and although I disagree with your views, they help to keep the conversation going and in the public eye.

It puzzles me that you quantify a common sense concern about the condition of our leaky pipeline infrastructure as being “selfish”? Our state’s 20,000 known Algonquin gas leaks have been releasing billions of cubic feet of methane (and other chemicals) unchecked for years. These are valuable gas reserves that are being wasted, released into our atmosphere and are harmful to our environment and health. Moreover, we have been paying a hefty price ­an estimated $640million­ $1.5billion from 2001­2011 for this “lost and unaccountable gas” in our electric bills. Even if we were facing an energy shortage, wouldn’t it make sense to fix the Algonquin pipeline infrastructure first? This logical fix would more than satisfy any possible shortfalls of natural gas for our electricity needs on those handfuls of days of peak usage in question.

You are correct, compared to many pipelines infrastructures, the Algonquin has been relatively unscathed by accidents SO FAR... But, pipeline accidents are on the rise in our country­ a combination of hasty construction, shabby materials and insufficient governmental oversight. Spectra’s Access Northeast plans to use 95% of the existing Algonquin pipeline patched in piecemeal with 31.4 miles of various sized new pipelines. This is a shortcut approach as Spectra, who’s in charge of pipeline construction, is in a hurry. Moreover, with its lengthy history of basic safety and quality standards violations, Spectra cannot be trusted. The Rehoboth compressor would be hooked up to aging pipes, compressing gas at high pressure in order to push much higher volumes of gas through the system. What can you imagine may be the result of adding 35% more gas at high pressure to the Algonquin in its present condition, with a compressor station next to our homes and pipelines running through our yards?

Or perhaps, you are suggesting its “selfish” to be concerned about the trajectory of how we will meet our state’s future energy needs? The economic impact of an expensive, outdated, one­ sided fossil fuel dependency could be devastating to our region. Once Spectra’s gas reserves hit the world market, **our gas prices will rise**​. While private corporations (including our monopolized utility​ companies) rake in the profits, we will be stuck holding the proverbial bag. Massachusetts ratepayers will end up hostages, paying top dollar for our electricity after having financed for 20 years an obsolete pipeline infrastructure we do not own. In 20 years, what kind of shape will 95% of the already failing Algonquin be in? Once you factor in the cost of repairs on nearly a century’s old pipeline, it is likely the Access Northeast with its LNG storage tanks, metering and compressor stations would have to be abandoned.

Access Northeast is nothing more than an expensive temporary fix for a private corporation’s mounting financial crisis brought on by years of wholesale fracking. As a state we are already 64% dependent on natural gas for our electricity, which is nearly double the national average of 33%. It is illogical to bank our state’s energy future on a single and already outdated fossil fuel technology as this pipeline expansion would do. Natural Gas does have a role to play for now; I am not suggesting it doesn’t. But our Energy future should consist of a diverse portfolio including natural gas, hydro, biomass, solar and wind facilities. Allowing for a diverse and competitive market will maximize benefits for consumers. In the meantime, we should hold our respective Massachusetts Department of Public Utility’s and utility company’s feet to the fire and insist every leaky pipe on the Algonquin is repaired. And while we’re at it, we should refuse to continue to foot the bill for even more billions of dollars of leaked gas from **their**​ pipeline. ​

It would be naïve to think Spectra Energy’s behemoth pipeline project is coming to town for our benefit. We will pay a huge price in more ways than one while Spectra and our utility companies have everything to gain. It would be not only unwise but “selfish” to be placated by Spectra’s lure of cheaper electricity prices to come. Wake up Rehoboth! This is a scenario none of us can afford.