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Whitmer Plan to Revoke Line 5 Easement Threatens Reliable, Affordable Energy for Michigan

By Jason Hayes

Summary

The governor's attempt to close rather than upgrade the Line 5 pipeline is part of a broader environmental policy that could subject Michigan residents to higher costs, restricted access to essential energy, and a diminished quality of life.

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Many Michigan residents who depend on propane could be forced to pay thousands of dollars more each year.

In her latest attack on Line 5, the pipeline that transports oil and natural gas liquids through the Straits of Mackinac, Michigan's governor has moved to revoke the 1953 easement contract that allows it to operate. This arbitrary and ill-advised move will shutter a key part of the state's essential energy infrastructure, increase the price of heating and transportation fuels, and threaten thousands of jobs.

With the move to revoke the easement, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer appears to be fleshing out her green energy agenda. But, stopping the flow of essential oil and natural gas liquids pushes Michigan residents toward an increasingly cold and dim future in which we pay exorbitant rates for the privilege of enduring rolling blackouts and limited, unreliable access to energy.

Whitmer claims our use of reliable energy sources "has already wrought devastating consequences for future generations," but she appears unmoved by the devastating consequences her plans will have today.

We can easily see what those impacts will be by looking at what supporters of similar plans elsewhere anticipate. For example, in a 2011 Daily Telegraph article, Steve Holiday, then chief executive of Britain's National Grid, informed families they would need to "change [their] behaviour." Holiday warned they would need to shed their expectations of having reliable electricity service and learn to consume electricity only "when it is available."

That counsel was echoed by Rutgers anthropology professor David McDermott Hughes. In a recent article, Hughes describes the economically destabilizing and environmentally destructive impacts of a Green New Deal-style shift to renewables and batteries. He downplays the need for reliable energy sources, recommending instead the unstable electric services available in post-Hurricane-Maria Puerto Rico and still-developing Zimbabwe as positive models for what electric service should look like. He contends that our demands for "continuous energy" and "business continuity" must be stifled to forestall the alleged climate crisis that drives the governor's CO2 plan.

California's rolling blackouts provide another bleak foretaste of what Michigan residents can expect under Whitmer's restrictive green energy

policies. The Golden State is farther along the path of embracing renewable energy, and this summer, Californians were forced to cope with an unreliable energy supply — a condition that exists in large part because of utilities’ heavy dependence on fickle renewable energy.

When electricity supplies can’t keep up with demand, utilities often cut service to large industrial customers, a practice they call “demand response.” This translates into common English as blackouts for industrial customers. But the summer heat wave made California so dangerously short of electricity that utilities extended the “service” to residential and small business customers as well.

When it comes to pipelines, the “shut-it-down” crowd ignores the value of the fuels and energy they supply, choosing instead to myopically focus on any potential risks pipelines might pose. Should the zealots be successful, the real and growing costs of their plans will be borne by average people. Michigan’s Upper Peninsula relies on Line 5 to supply roughly 65% of the propane they use to heat their homes during Michigan’s frigid winters. In fact, the Wolverine State is the largest consumer of residential propane in the U.S. Over 330,000 households rely on it each day, and the governor’s own energy task force admitted that alternatives would be prohibitively expensive.

If Line 5 were shut down, Upper Peninsula residents who could first afford the \$25,000 cost of converting from propane to electric heating would then face annual heating costs about \$3,500 above what they currently pay. And for what? Certainly not an improved environment.

Pipelines are more efficient and safer than transporting essential fuels by either rail or truck. But pipeline opponents aren’t interested in allowing them to move. Their “leave it in the ground” mindset requires that we eliminate hydrocarbons and the means of transporting them, now, no matter the economic disruption and hardship. By contrast, the proposed upgrades to Line 5 would come at no cost to taxpayers. They would improve essential energy infrastructure and wholly remove the pipeline from the waters of the Great Lakes, encasing it in a cement-lined tunnel 100 feet below the lake bed.

Rather than needlessly impose California’s unenviable condition on its residents, Michigan’s state government should allow the Line 5 tunnel project to proceed.

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