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NEES Files Briefs with DPU Questions Proposed Berkshire, Columbia Gas Contracts with Tennessee Gas Pipeline Company

BOSTON -- A leading nonprofit group has filed two briefs with the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities (DPU) charging that proposed contracts for natural gas for the proposed Northeast Direct (NED) Pipeline have gone largely uninvestigated and are putting economic and environmental interests at an avoidable risk.

Northeast Energy Solutions (NEES), representing stakeholders responsible for more than 80,000 acres of conservation land, called on the DPU to deny requests by Columbia Gas and Berkshire Gas to sign natural gas contracts with the Tennessee Gas Pipeline Co.

NEES said that the two Massachusetts gas companies failed to provide the DPU with a "significant and thorough analysis to support claims of reduced electricity prices for the benefit of Massachusetts electric and gas ratepayers."

NEES also strongly questioned the DPU for making a "fundamental error" for not requiring Berkshire Gas "to deeply and specifically answer or explain" the need for "their self-ballyhooed moratorium on new service" for their customers.

"Berkshire Gas has not explained the impact of the moratorium on present and potential future demand or what impact, if any, lifting the moratorium would have on demand," said Vincent DeVito, legal counsel for NEES and a former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Energy for Policy and International Affairs.

DeVito said a more thorough evaluation of the proposed contracts would show that they "do not offer genuine economic benefits to consumers or communities" and put at risk environmentally protected lands along the proposed route of the Northeast Direct Pipeline.

Berkshire and Columbia Gas, he said, failed to meet DPU's guidelines that a gas company must show that the contract "compares favorably to the range of alternative options reasonably available to the companies and its customers and are consistent with the companies portfolio objectives."

NEES (www.NEEnergySolutions.org) was established to provide sound analysis, public education, and effective advocacy related to proposed energy transport projects in the Northeast.

The organization's members include the towns of Lenox, MA, and Stephentown, NY, as well as Berkshire Natural Resources Council, East Quabbin Land Trust, Franklin Land Trust, Green Berkshires, Nashua River Watershed Association, Richmond Land Trust, The Trustees of Reservations, and the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition, an Association of more than 130 organizations.

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Copies of the two briefs filed with the DPU are available at www.NEEnergySolutions.org