

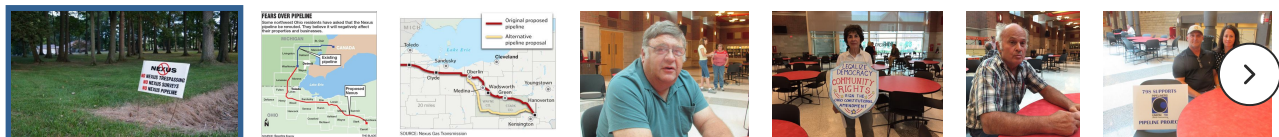


METRO

Nexus pipeline opponents urge U.S. postal service to investigate lobbying group (photos)

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Lorain Nexus



By [Michael Sangiacomo, The Plain Dealer](#)

The U.S. Postal Service has been asked by residents of Northeast Ohio to investigate a Houston-based oil and gas lobbyist that used some of their names without permission to bolster support for a pipeline through the state.

Akron attorney David Mucklow filed the request on behalf of the Coalition to Reroute Nexus, a group of property owners who oppose the natural gas project proposed by the Nexus Gas Transmission.

Mucklow asked the postal inspection service and the Federal Energy Review Commission to conduct a criminal review of the Consumer Energy Alliance. CEA sent 347 letters to FERC using the names of local residents, including an Ohio man who has been dead since 1998.

The complaint can be viewed on the website of [FERC](#), the federal agency that will decide if Nexus is permitted to construct a 255-mile pipeline to carry natural gas from Eastern Ohio to Northern Michigan and Ontario, Canada. The document includes affidavits from 14 Ohio residents who deny writing letters approving the pipeline as well as giving permission to the CEA to write letters on their behalf.

"This is an extremely serious matter," Mucklow said in the filing. "Submission of hundreds of bogus comment letters during the comment period is calculated to convey the false impression that there is widespread public support for construction and operation of the pipeline."

Postal investigator Tammy Mayle of the Pittsburgh regional office, which includes Ohio, said her office has not seen the complaint but noted that such an investigation is a complicated process.

Mayle said if warranted, such a complaint could eventually include the attorney general of the state where the letters originated, which would be Texas in this case. Mucklow said the investigation also should involve the U.S. Attorney General's Office.

CEA President David Holt has said his company used computers to robocall 25,000 homes, mostly in Ohio, asking for support of the pipeline project. CEA then generated letters from questions asked by computers during the calls, attributing them the letters to owners of the telephone numbers dialed. Those letters were mailed to FERC with the residents' names but did not indicate CEA's involvement in the process.

A number of Ohio residents were angry after learning about the letters. Some say they don't even recall getting a robocall. The homeowners were not shown copies of the letters that went with their names on them, Holt said. No effort was made to determine who in

the household took the survey. The name of long-deceased Glenn England of Risingsun, Ohio, near Toledo, was on one of the letters.

Holt, responding Thursday to the latest complaint by CORN, accused the anti-pipeline residents of trying to "co-opt the FERC process."

"There is nothing new in this filing from CORN," Holt said in an email. "Consumer Energy Alliance (CEA) has developed various methods over the past 10 years to allow CEA members and the public to participate in comment periods established by regulatory agencies. CEA takes numerous steps -- and maintains meticulous records -- to ensure that the comments generated and submitted to regulatory agencies are valid expressions of support for energy projects."

But CORN co-founder Jonathan Strong said what CEA did "was criminal" and that CEA and FERC need to be held accountable.

"FERC does not seem to care about accountability," Strong said. "The whole evaluation process has been co-opted by oil and gas. This is a new day. We must stand up against this kind of activity or it will not change."

FERC declined to comment about the complaint. However, spokeswoman Tamara Young Allen said the commission will look into the concerns raised.

"The person or entity that raises the issue does not matter. We do not vet our letters, that's not part of our process," Allen said. "We look at the science. We operate like a court. We look at the facts of a proposal."

She said anyone who feels misrepresented could send a letter to FERC, though FERC will not remove the letter generated by the CEA in a person's name.

Construction on the pipeline could begin early next year. It would run through hundreds of private properties, including many in Medina, Lorain and Summit counties.

Strong said CORN contacted 41 people whose letters appeared on FERC's website saying they favor the pipeline. He said every one contacted denied sending a letter.

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