

Pipeline about future generations

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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“In all of our deliberations, we must be mindful of the impact of our decisions on the seven generations to follow ours.”

This Great Law of the Iroquois is inscribed on a steel sculpture of human silhouettes that rise from a windswept hill in the Boulder Valley of Montana.

The quote reminds us to be aware of how the decisions we make today impact generations to come.

A decision facing Nebraskans today is whether we should allow a pipeline to carry tar sand oil through our ecologically fragile Sandhills.

In a nutshell, Keystone XL Pipeline officials promise jobs and economic boon to Nebraskans and less dependence on oil from the Middle East.

Critics fear environmental risk as pipe would be buried in porous soil over the Ogallala Aquifer. They also worry what the oil company’s moral and financial responsibilities will be when leaks or ruptures occur.

Although those problems may not happen in my lifetime, they will sometime during the next seven generations.

Time to make good decisions is needed so different perspectives can be considered.

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I also believe that good resolution comes from both the heart and the mind, which doesn't often happen in our quick-fix and hurry-up society.

By the end of the year, the Obama administration will decide whether or not to grant the oil company a permit to build the pipeline. If the company gets a green light, Nebraskans apparently can decide the location of the route—a subject some state senators want to discuss during a special session.

Because the pipeline originates across the border in Canada, federal politicians are calling the shots on an issue that will directly affect Nebraskans and generations to follow.

Granted, they have reports about the project, and theories about what will or will not occur if the pipeline carries tar sand oil through the Sandhills. But they have no connection to the land.

They are as ill-equipped to make that decision as I would be about granting a permit for a pipeline under Capitol Hill.

In rural Nebraska, most of us are connected to the prairie, its undulating hills, wide-open spaces and to the creatures with whom we share the land.

In large cities, like Washington D.C., light pollution hides the stars and traffic noise dulls the song of cicadas which makes it easier to disconnect from nature.

I wonder how mindful decisions about our planet, and future generations, can be made if we have no connection to it?

Considering how a pipeline through the Sandhills, or any other part of Nebraska, will affect the next seven generations is of utmost importance.

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That's what I hope we remember.

Note: U.S. state department officials are accepting testimony about the safety of the \$7 billion pipeline project, and whether it's in the national interest, on Thursday, Sept. 29, at West Holt High School in Atkinson, from 4:30-10 p.m.