**House votes today on making it easier for companies to take land**

*Farmers and ranchers say legislators are ignoring landowner concerns*

BISMARCK, ND --- Landowners in North Dakota continue to speak out against a bill that would make it easier for oil, pipeline and electric companies to take their land by eminent domain for pipelines, energy facilities or power lines. The House of Representatives may vote on final passage of the bill today.

Bob Banderet who farms near Cogswell, ND said, “Allowing utilities and pipeline companies to exercise eminent domain before even obtaining a permit will put the landowner at a distinct disadvantage. Any incentive for the company to negotiate with the landowner will be removed.”

Current law does not allow companies to threaten eminent domain when they first meet with landowners. The bill – SB 2209 – would remove that stipulation. Banderet said, companies could threaten eminent domain “before the PSC has even held hearings and gotten input from the public.  The pressure on a landowner to sign an agreement quickly will be even greater.”

Farmers and ranchers have many concerns when companies come for easements on landowners’ property. These include trespassing, erosion, damaging property and crops, premature threats of eminent domain, years of reduced production, haphazard reclamation of land that results in turning the land to weeds, problems with dust and magnesium chloride, and refusal of the company to negotiate.

Greg Tank a rancher in McKenzie County said, “We are being swept under the rug. We’re getting run over. Our state isn’t stepping up to help as they should.  When pipelines come through with that amount of equipment they impact the land and decrease production of crops for many years. The companies get the right to control our land and reduce productivity, but we still have to pay property taxes on it.”

Banderet and Tank are members of the Dakota Resource Council. Banderet has been to the legislature to testify several times this session and is disappointed that most legislators are ignoring landowners concerns.  He said North Dakota state government “isn’t enforcing the law now. The pressure tactics of companies are bad enough right now. It’s ‘take it or leave it.’ What’s it going to be like after this?”

Tank said county governments are getting involved to help, but there is a lack of respect from state officials. He said, “Landowners are getting empty promises of what will be done. Reclamation is not being followed up on. No one wants to stand up to these companies. No one from the state comes out to see what is going on. There are wide violations of our rights and our stewardship of the land.”

Both agreed that SB 2209 would grease the skids for the companies even more than it already is.

-30-