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Arcuri visits Norwich to give update on NYRI fight

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NORWICH – A crowd of about 100 attended a public meeting Saturday at the Norwich Fire House to protest the federal government's potential use of eminent domain, a law that would ultimately allow privately-held New York Regional Interconnect Inc.'s power line to go through.

Congressman Michael A. Arcuri, D-Utica, hosted the gathering to highlight the Department of Energy's "disingenuous" effort to inform the public about the matter at an upcoming meeting in Rochester, more than 125 miles away from the nearest affected landowner.

"It seems to me that this location is more for the convenience of representatives of the DOE and not the constituency the proposed (NYRI) project would affect," Arcuri said.

Arcuri also hosted a similar gathering in Utica on May 31.

NYRI's 190-mile long line of towers – many as high as 115 feet – would transmit upstate's electricity to meet customer demands downstate. The proposed route begins in Utica and extends to Rock Tavern in Orange County. The opposition says the project would bring higher prices for electricity upstate, scar the scenic region's tourism industry and pose health risks.

The DOE announced a draft mid-Atlantic Area National Interest Electric Transmission Corridor for New York State in April. The corridor encompasses NYRI's proposed route, 44 miles of which cut through Chenango County. Arcuri told those gathered that U.S. Representatives Maurice Hinchey, John Hall, himself and other elected officials in New York are encouraging those affected by the DOE's proposed corridors in Virginia, Pennsylvania and Ohio to join what he

called a “non-partisan, national issue.”

“We are trying to throw up as many roadblocks as possible,” he said. The group has proposed an amendment to evaluate the safety and security of placing high voltage direct current electric transmission lines along active railroad rights-of-way as well as proposed cutting funding to the DOE.

“We are trying to put up as many fronts as we can to keep this project from going through,” he said.

About 20 individuals spoke out at the nearly two-hour meeting. Earl Callahan, of Guilford, said it is time for those opposed “to go on the offensive.”

“This is an energy policy that was created in secret with secret individual participants led by Vice President Dick Cheney doing what they want. Our government is helping them attain their goal of privatizing the national energy industry,” he said.

Kenneth Folgerty of Guilford said the eminent domain issue is an example of the federal government “going into new territory, taking private homes for private companies.”

Congressman Arcuri was quick to encourage individuals not to turn the issue into a fight between upstate and downstate, however. “There are 400,000 of us and 7 to 8 million of them. That’s why it can’t be them versus us,” he said.

“This is not a benefit for New York City. It’s only a benefit for NYRI investors. This is the key to our opposition. NYRI wants to play this their way. They want to pit upstate against downstate. We are not in that game. We think there is a better way to do this. We will work together and be good neighbors to New York City, but this is a very bad plan.”

Chris Rossi, president of STOP NYRI, said the matter was a state’s rights issue.

“Can we bring a lawsuit against the federal government?” she asked Arcuri.

While he said he couldn’t speak for the state, the congresssman said he would “push hard” for it at the state level. He said it might come down to individual landowners getting together, getting a temporary restraining order against NYRI, and forcing the matter to be heard in the courts.

The Syracuse region director for U.S. Senator Hillary Clinton told the crowd to expect something from Clinton on the issue in the next two to three weeks. “We will be getting as many people as possible to speak out against this at the Rochester meeting,” Jay Biba said. The DOE’s meeting is set for June 12.

A dairy farmer from Oneida County, Dick Corbin, said he owns 40 acres on one side of the proposed route and 50 acres on the other side, but had yet to be contacted by representatives from NYRI.

“I never heard a word about this. Nobody’s contacted me. My guess is it’s a private thing,” he said. _

Elizabeth Staulter and John Salka, both from the Nine Mile Swamp area in Madison County, lamented the possibility of high towers cutting through the swamp.

“What are we leaving our children? We are asking them for the rest of their lives to look at power lines that emit electromagnetic radiation,” Salka said.

“It would be a tremendous shame to have towers in view of the tremendous scenery of Nine Mile Swamp,” Staulter said. She suggested that a power generator be built on a tract of state land that is located directly across from Rock Tavern.

Norwich radiologist Dr. Lawrence Rosenblum said studies of childhood leukemia and brain cancer show increased instances in those who reside within in 600 meters of power lines such as that proposed by NYRI. “It’s ridiculous to state in their proposal that there are not effects on health,” he said. “It’s just an outrage. If this is any indication of the quality of their submission, then the whole thing should be thrown in the garbage.”

Theodora Arnell, a Norwich business owner, said to call the project a “national interest project” is “irrational and immoral.”

Local officials in attendance were City of Norwich Supervisor Linda E. Natoli, Wards 4, 5 and 6; Town of Sherburne Supervisor Harry W. Conley and City of Norwich Alderman Terry J. Bresina, Ward 1.