

Stripping the “Public” out of Public Comment Sessions for the MVP
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(Testimony to the People’s Hearing December 2, 2016)

Thesis: The Public’s Voice has been stripped from public scoping meetings for the Mountain Valley Pipeline that were conducted by FERC MVP Project Manager Paul Friedman in Elliston Virginia on May 5, 2015 and Roanoke Virginia on November 3, 2016.

In both sessions there was a the common pattern in Friedman’s behavior of circumventing and converting “public hearings” for the purpose collecting citizens’ concern and information to a systematic effort by Friedman to manipulate public opinion, dissuade opposition to the MVP and cloud any public record of that opposition.

According to a letter submitted to FERC by Elizabeth and Scott Malbon (20150506-5104-30556806), Friedman conducted the Elliston meeting in a highly unprofessional, partisan manner, allowing the few supporters of the MVP to exceed the three minute speaking limit, while strictly limiting opponents and ordering the stenographer to erase opponents’ comments that ran over or he ruled out of order.

He also repeatedly peppered his captured audience with “news flashes” consisting of half-truths and flat out lies which were intended to refute the opposition’s comments, pacify the audience and whitewash the official transcript. For example, he dismissed unease that the gas transported by the pipeline would be exported. That claim has been flatly contradicted by a partner in the MVP, WGL Midstream (Roanoke Times, June 25, 2015).

In Roanoke this year, Friedman continued the same strategy and, to be even more effective, avoided public hearings altogether by replacing a public meeting with one-on-one three minute individual testimonies to a FERC stenographer. However, the badgering, speaking over people and refutation of citizens’s concerns continued. Friedman, who was present for many of these recording sessions, interrupted individuals, disrupting their carefully prepared statements, disputing their concerns, and thereby (once again) whitewashed the public record.

Example 1: The proposed Mountain Valley Pipeline will transect the center of Newport Village, in Giles County, coming withing 65 feet of an elderly couples home, just across the street from the Mt. Olivet United Methodist Church. The couple Fern and Earl Echols used their three-minutes with the stenographer to register their fear that they would be forced from their home. Friedman interrupted to assure them that “No home will be taken... You will never be removed from your home.” He continued: “Thousands of people live near millions of miles of pipeline in the United States... sometime right next to houses and “nothing ever happens.” The Echols reported that MVP’s local project manager disagreed, volunteering that he personally had relocated other people (Roanoke Times, Nov. 27 2016).

Example 2: Ray Roberts, a resident of Craig County, started his remarks to the stenographer by listing his concern for properties along the proposed route, including the Newport Methodist Church when Paul Friedman interrupted to disqualify his statement and instructed the stenographer to erase it.

Conclusion: This is not the behavior of a impartial manager, but the manipulations of a partisan. They make a mockery of the “public comments” in the FERC scoping process.