

## Jortner, Wayne

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**From:** Ross Conrad <dancingbhoney@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, October 22, 2015 11:04 AM  
**To:** Jortner, Wayne  
**Subject:** Comments on Public Service Department

One of the biggest issues with the way the PSD is structured is that the governor appoints the PSD commissioner. Thus, if the commissioner wants to keep their job, they have to do what the governor wants. This seems to be the only adequate explanation for why the PSD has done such a poor job actually representing the interests of the majority of the people of Vermont rather than the interests of corporations and select government officials.

The recent PSB hearings on Vermont Gas illustrate this issue perfectly. Every step of the way, the PSD seems to be looking out for the interests of Vermont Gas while giving nothing tangible but lip service to the interests of working Vermonters.

1. When reviewing and deciding whether to support the VGS pipeline proposal, did the PSD thoroughly review the financial claims made by VGS in their petition to the Public Service Board? No. They simply took VGS numbers at face value, or gave them a cursory look over at best. This resulted in major over budget reports by VGS on their pipeline project, not once, but twice!
2. When VGS broke the rules and withheld critical financial information from the PSB what did the PSD do? They recommended a minor fine of \$35,000. It is questionable how such a minor slap on the wrist would prevent the company from repeating such a violation and in fact it didn't. When VGS was caught withholding timely financial information a second time, the PSD repeated their minor recommendation of a small fine. Thankfully the PSB is a bit more independent (though they too are appointed and have some answering to the governor to do of their own) and fined VGS \$100,000 for this second offense. The inadequacy of the PSD recommendation for a \$35,000 fine proved to be wholly inadequate (twice) and is but one example of how much the PSD looks out for corporate interests over those of regular Vermonters.
3. A review of the PSB hearings on Phase I of the pipeline indicate how lame a job the PSD is doing looking out for the interest of the citizens of Vermont. All the indepth research and review of VGS information that found numerous flaws in their methodology, was conducted by citizens of the state (albeit citizens motivated by the fact the pipeline was coming through their living rooms) rather than the PSD. A true citizen watchdog group would have looked into the assumptions VGS was making in their filing for a pipeline in order to verify their accuracy and therefore the actual benefit or non-benefit as the case seems to be, of their proposal. Should the PSB decide to reopen the CPG for the VGS project, this will simply be another example of the poor judgement and lousy service Vermonters are getting from their Public Service Department who has wholeheartedly supported the pipeline project every step of the way with very little questioning or skepticism.

Given that Governor Shumlin has repeatedly expressed support for the gas pipeline, it appears that the PSD is simply doing his bidding rather than truly representing the public interest.

The alternative to having the PSD commissioner appointed is to have him elected by the voters, but alas due to the undue influence of money in our political process, it is highly questionable if such a switch would improve on the PSD's performance. I would suggest instead that we allow the commissioner to be appointed, but not make their appointment conditional on the governor, but instead conditional perhaps the Vermont legislature or just the Senate, so that the commissioners accountability would at least be a little closer to the actual citizens of the state. I am certainly open to any other suggestion that would allow the DPS to be more independent and

effective in their role.

Bees be with you,  
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