

# We are the stewards of a special land

I write today to express my deepest concerns about the 500,000-volt transmission line that Dominion Virginia Power proposes to erect across the Virginia Piedmont.

My first memories are the family travels into the Northern Piedmont from our house in the Washington, D.C. suburbs to visit our grandfather at our family's historic farm in the Crooked Run Valley near Delaplane.

The journey west along the bucolic, two-lane Route 55 from Washington into the rolling foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains always triggered an instructive reminder from our dad that we were crossing into "God's Country."

He liked to remind his young sons, C. Edward Strother III and me, that the Virginia Piedmont was a special place, enriched with cultural sweeping historical importance.

"My sons, you are entering Hallowed Ground, a defining landscape in our nation's history that is of critical importance to our family's place within that history," he would say.

"It is a landscape that has remained virtually unchanged since the time the native peoples of America once made their home in the Piedmont. It is where our Founding Fathers carved out a new nation that would become the model of democratic ideals throughout the entire world," he said.

"We are the stewards of these lands," he continued. "It is a landscape of unsurpassed beauty that God Almighty created for every generation of His children to cherish and behold."

Our winding journey led along the southern side of Thoroughfare Gap, past what is today the county line between Prince William and Fauquier Counties. Across the Gap on the southern face of the Bull Run Mountains is a spring that flows from the center of a rugged precipice like a glisten-



## THE FORUM

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ing diamond.

We often stopped here on our journey for a reflective moment, as Dad would note that if we looked hard enough we may just catch a remaining glimpse of the footprints of the Gray Ghost and his Rangers who drank from that very spot during the War.

Our journey continued through the village of The Plains and on past Oak Hill, the home of U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Marshall until we reached the Cobbler Mountain pass. Through the pass the Blue Ridge Mountains rise in the horizon with majestic grace and the Crooked Run Valley opens beneath with deafening beauty.

It is along this course that Dominion has selected to erect its line. But their proposal is objectionable on many levels.

Forty miles of high-voltage towers cutting through the northern Piedmont would decimate significant resources and precious agricultural lands, much of which is protected by conservation easements.

These resources are irreplaceable and, once destroyed, the damage is irreversible.

Dominion has failed to demonstrate a need for this power line, or prove any inadequacy of our existing power supply. They have not satisfactorily answered questions about whether the proposal would reduce transmission congestion — if it even exists — or why they can't maximize existing towers and infrastructure.

Given the historical and cultural importance of Virginia's northern Piedmont to

the entire nation, Dominion's proposal cannot be permitted to go forward until this transmission line is truly consistent with the public interest and our energy needs — as opposed to a business plan for achieving a competitive advantage to increase corporate profits.

Of particular concern to me is the devastating effect that this transmission line would have on local pick-your-own orchards and farm wineries.

Many of the apple and peach orchards of Virginia's northern Piedmont have been in existence for hundreds of years. They are contributing members of the agri-tourism economy and give the area a unique sense of place, enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.

Fauquier is also the heart of Virginia's wine country, being home to a number of farm wineries. The farm wine industry is establishing a presence in the national market while continuing to serve as a valued part of the local community.

If the orchards and farm wineries lose their attraction for tourists, they will undoubtedly cease to exist, and many will be sold and developed. Viable agricultural lands and scenic landscapes will be irreversibly lost in exchange for more houses and the increased traffic that comes with development.

I would encourage anyone who values our rural economy, pristine landscapes and historical resources to join me in opposition to Dominion's proposal. This is a threat to our community, our local economy and our quality of life.

We must preserve this land and a viable rural economy now and for our children.

*Philip Carter Strother is an attorney with a practice in Richmond. The family homeplace is Valley View Farm, Delaplane.*