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## North Dakota officials warn Lancaster County in preparation for mass pipeline protests: 'Go big. Go fast.'



SAM JANESCH | Staff Writer May 5, 2017



Sen. Scott Martin and other local officials video conference with officials from North Dakota.

DAN MARSCHKA | Staff Photographer

If opposition surrounding the Atlantic Sunrise pipeline has even the possibility of evolving into the next hotbed for national environmental protests, then local officials better start getting ready now.

That was the message of nearly a dozen North Dakota state and local officials when they spoke to their counterparts in Lancaster County on Thursday [at the request of state Sen. Scott Martin](#).

Martin said the purpose of the video teleconference was to ensure the county is prepared to handle expected protests for the pipeline, which is scheduled to be buried through 37 miles of western and southern Lancaster County.

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Construction is expected to begin this summer.

The focus of his concern was not necessarily the [hundreds of Lancastrians who have been actively training for nonviolent protesting](#) — some of whom [were outside the invitation-only meeting at the Farm & Home Center](#) — but those who may come from out of state to join in.

“Unfortunately, a lot of times these things can be overwhelmed from outside groups,” said Martin, noting that 94 percent of the more than 700 arrests during the Dakota Access Pipeline protests were out-of-staters.

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**"Go big. Go fast. These things can spin out of control before you have a chance to even realize where you're at."**

*~ Cody Schulz, chair of the Morton County board of commissioners*

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That mass protest near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation last summer generated international headlines. Months of encampments escalated into some violence and challenges for local residents and police.

More than 40 representatives from Lancaster County's local police forces, state troopers, EMS providers, the district attorney's office and state legislators listened to the perspectives and lessons learned from the North Dakotan officials who dealt with the situation first-hand.



**Sen. Scott Martin begins planning response to Atlantic Sunrise pipeline protests in Lancaster County; Opponents call it 'disrespectful'**

“To say this came as a surprise is an understatement,” said Julie Ellingson, president of the North Dakota Stockmen’s Association and landowner in the area of the protests.

Ellingson said the attention caught locals off guard in the rural, remote community. She remembers a young man showing up at her door with a petition on July 31, and she had no idea then that 10 days later the pipeline opposition would “blow up” into a national media scene.

Rob Keller, public information officer for the Morton County Sheriff’s Department, said social media engagement as a way to further the cause was what officials really were not prepared for.

“They were able to turn their narrative around in seconds,” Keller said.

Along with others on the North Dakota side of the panel, Keller said having a social media strategy and communication with the public was vital, and something with which they were often playing catch-up. Also important, they said, was having an understanding of the leadership structure for the protesters and keeping an open dialogue.

Ron Rauschenberger, who served as chief of staff to North Dakota Gov. Jack Dalrymple during the crisis, said help from the federal government was minimal and slow. If this is going to happen to Lancaster, start preparing now, he and others said.

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“Go big. Go fast. These things can spin out of control before you have a chance to even realize where you’re at,” said Cody Schulz, chair of the Morton County board of commissioners. “So if this happens to you it’s very resource intensive top to bottom.”

Martin, responding to one of the officials’ statements that the protesters in North Dakota were being paid and also benefiting from GoFundMe campaigns, asked if officials have identified who was paying them.

Rauschenberger said so far they have not been able to identify that — it’s difficult to track that information, he said.

## Protesters respond



Protesters gather with signs and a quilt to draw attention to their cause opposing the pipeline in Lancaster County. Nick Martin is the activist in the foreground that helped organize the protest at the Farm and Home Center.

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Outside on the lawn in front of the Farm & Home Center, off Manheim Pike, Mark Clatterbuck said his group Lancaster Against Pipelines being shuttered from the meeting was like hosting a panel discussion about women’s health care but barring any women from attending.