



SIERRA CLUB MICHIGAN CHAPTER

9/7/2016

To: Chairman Casperson and members of the Senate Natural Resources Committee
From: Gail Philbin, Sierra Club Michigan Chapter

RE: Consideration of the appointment of Heidi Grether as Director of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality

On behalf of our 80,000 members and supporters, the Sierra Club Michigan Chapter urges you to reject the appointment of Heidi Grether as Director of Michigan's Department of Environmental Quality.

The DEQ faces many environmental challenges and has had a disappointing track record in recent years. It allowed the community of Flint to be poisoned by lead. It didn't properly regulate corporate polluters in Wayne County like AK Steel, Marathon Petroleum, and DTE Energy. It failed to clean up pollution in the 48217 ZIP code, the third most polluted area in the country and a hotspot for environmental injustice. The agency's less than stellar record of approving permit after permit for corporations currently in violation of the Clean Air Act is evidence that DEQ needs a leader who can separate the need to protect the people of Michigan from the need to pacify corporations. On top of this, the DEQ has yet to act to end the threat posed by the 63-year old Enbridge Line 5 pipeline to the health of our Great Lakes and the drinking water for millions of people.

In light of these challenges, the DEQ needs the most highly qualified person to serve as director, who will value and champion public health and the environment over business as usual. The DEQ needs someone who has a deep understanding of environmental and public health threats facing Michigan and more importantly, experience working to prevent and mitigate those threats. Heidi Grether is someone who is clearly qualified for many important positions. There is nothing, however, in Ms. Grether's experience and work background that qualifies her to meet the standard of excellence needed at the DEQ. In fact, her experience is quite the opposite. She spent twenty years lobbying for one of America's worst polluters, BP Oil, and four years doing public relations in connection with BP's Deepwater Horizon disaster, America's most devastating oil spill. The DEQ needs a leader who has direct experience protecting the environment, not someone whose background is more suited to advocate for the polluters she would need to regulate as DEQ director.

The nomination of an oil industry lobbyist to be Michigan's environmental chief is of particular concern because the oil industry is a powerful industry with a long track record of responsibility for environmental and public health threats in our communities. Concerns about Michigan's existing and proposed oil and gas pipelines, drilling, extraction, and fracking activities, and pollution from refining of oil are all issues that the DEQ director will directly deal with and which demand experience with environmental protection, regulation, and enforcement. Ms Grether's experience with an industry and company that fights environmental protection and regulations and caused environmental catastrophes that America and Michigan are still recovering from today are arguments against—not for—her confirmation.

As Michigan leaders consider the fate of the 63 year-old Enbridge Line 5 that crosses the Straits of Mackinac, the DEQ Director must be someone with an independent voice whose decisions and judgments

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are not in question because of past relationships with those she is charged to regulate. Line 5 threatens the largest bodies of freshwater in the world, and the drinking water, tourism and other businesses of millions of people. After the largest inland oil spill in our nation's history happened on the Kalamazoo River, Michigan's DEQ Director must be particularly vigilant about ensuring that our water and air are protected from oil pollution. Ms Grether's two decades of work for BP Oil disqualifies her from this critical role.

Ms. Grether's longtime relationship with the oil industry is troubling in and of itself. She is in a position to make decisions that benefit the oil industry and capitalize on a revolving door relationship, especially when her appointment comes in the second and last term of a governor. She has already betrayed her leanings by announcing she will decline to enforce the easement agreement with Enbridge on Line 5 despite multiple violations. The DEQ needs a director who does not have blatant conflicts of interest when it comes to regulating the fossil fuel industry and protecting the environment.

For these reasons, the Sierra Club Michigan Chapter and the Sierra Club's Michigan Beyond Coal Campaign urge you to reject the appointment of Heidi Grether as Director of the Department of Environmental Quality.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Gail Philbin
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