

Testimony of Leslie B. Otten to the NH Site Evaluation Committee

March 7, 2016

Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to speak. I am Les Otten, owner of Maine Energy Systems – a renewable energy company founded in 2008 - and developer of the Balsams Resort in Dixville.

I'm for clean energy, and renewable resources. I have long supported replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy. In fact – that's what Maine Energy Systems does – deliver efficient wood pellet boilers and heating systems so residents and businesses can stop burning oil and propane.

I am also for jobs, and growing our North Country economy. I've spent the last 2-and-a-half years creating a plan for the Balsams that could lift the entire region. The fulfillment of that plan is my first responsibility.

Personally, I believe that climate change is real. It's our responsibility to mitigate the most potentially damaging activity man has inflicted on our planet. But this is about jobs and the economy - and Dixville in particular was where manufacturing, power and tourism thrived together for decades. Power has been a central component in the North Country's history.

People resist change – and they fear the unknown. I completely understand. We have a Hydro Quebec line that is taller than the proposed Northern Pass line, built in 1986. That line runs directly through major tourism areas – without negative impacts.

And 33 wind turbines were built on mountain ridges above Dixville and depending on perspective – they dominate the viewscape. For me, it's not credible to say a power line along the valley floor would hurt the viewscape.

If I thought for a minute that wind towers and Northern Pass would keep people away from the Balsams – I certainly would not be spearheading a \$143 million investment into restoring it.

From a life-time developing resorts in NH and across the country - I know that tourism will be not be negatively impacted by the line.

Views are important. I should know. But the North Country is also facing serious social and economic issues. The highest unemployment in NH –

which has caused our young workers to leave. A drug addiction epidemic. Schools, roads and other infrastructure that all need more funds to fix.

The socioeconomic situation of Coos County has been declining for years. It is *only* going to deteriorate further if we continue to rely *only* on what we have now.

Northern Pass, through the Forward New Hampshire Fund, has invested \$2 million in our project without strings. And we are discussing the potential for a more substantial investment by the Fund as Northern Pass progresses. This will help us fulfill our goal of restoring the Balsams resort and revitalizing the North Country economy.

When we re-open with Phase 1 – Northern Pass will also save the Balsams significant annual energy costs. That's welcome news – since we know NH pays among the highest rates for electricity in the Continental U.S. – and we'll use a lot of energy.

As I talk to people about Northern Pass, they're all looking for proof that it will benefit the North Country. The Balsams is proof. Northern Pass didn't have to step up early and invest in our project. This is a risk for them – but it's important to Northern Pass that the Balsams succeeds – and that the entire North Country prospers.

Already – Northern Pass is helping the North Country in a very significant way. Approving the project will bring much more investment into our region.

Let there be no doubt I favor the rebirth of the North Country - and I favor Northern Pass and the opportunities it will create - which may well endure for the next century.