

CITIZENS OPPOSED TO THE MERGER PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate release

For more information, contact Gary Robison at (308) 991-3039

Kingsley Family Opposes CNPPID Merger

HOLDREGE -- The family of George P. Kingsley, founder of the irrigation system that created Lake McConaughy and CNPPID, has weighed in against the proposed merger with Dawson Public Power District.

Four great-grandchildren of Kingsley (Tim Kingsley, Liz Mattson, David Kingsley and Nancy Oertle) have written a letter urging the CNPPID board of directors to vote against the merger at the special meeting at 9 a.m., Friday, July 28.

“Our great grandfather, George P. Kingsley, gave his time, money, and the last 20 years of his life to the formation of what is today Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District,” the grandchildren wrote in a letter to CNPPID directors. “His dream was to bring irrigation to the fertile lands of the tri-county basin (Kearney, Phelps, Gosper). Those farms are the heartbeat of the communities within, and their sustainability is dependent upon agriculture.”

In the letter, the Kingsley great-grandchildren pointed out DPPD’s article on “12 Values to the Merger” on its website. The article states that one advantage to the merger is vertical integration.

“The merger ‘equates to political and industry clout,’ and we fear that is the only reason the executives within want this merger,” the grandchildren wrote. “The article lays out the numerous reasons this merger will benefit Dawson Public Power, but Central’s website seems to lack such an article. Why? We believe there are no clear benefits to the constituents of CNPPID...”

The Dawson article also states, “There’s an old saying ‘whiskey is for drinking and water is for fighting.’ Water (access to/control of) will be one of the single biggest issues in a matter of 10 years or less.”

“Water is a highly sought after and valuable commodity,” the grandchildren pointed out. “Why would the constituents of Central want to give up the local control of this invaluable commodity? As we read through the 12 items listed in the article, we are reminded just how amazing Central is, and how it is something to fight to preserve. What exactly is Dawson Public Power bringing to this merger?”

Dr. David N. Kingsley said his great-grandfather would be “rolling over” in his grave about the proposed merger and would “shout don’t do it!”

“Why would anyone agree to a merger that so blatantly benefits one side (DPPD)?” Dr. Kingsley said. “Central has so little to gain and so much to lose, and who loses the most? Farmers. What was the whole system designed for? Farmers.”

Dr. Kingsley encouraged anyone who has a cabin at Johnson Lake or has recreated at any of the lakes created by this exceptional project, including Lake McConaughy, to take note of this potential merger.

“Politics and power have poisoned so many things,” he said. “Don't let this merger poison our beautiful Nebraska land.”

Gary Robison, president of Citizens Opposed to the Merger, expressed gratitude for the Kingsley family's statement in opposition to the merger.

“George Kingsley foresaw the future of farming in central Nebraska: deliver irrigation water and thrive, or wither and die,” Robison said. “Since last fall, we have been fighting tooth and nail to preserve his legacy and stop this merger madness.”

For nearly three years, Central's management has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars pursuing a merger with Dawson Public Power District, a rural retail electric utility serving customers north of the Platte. If approved, Central would surrender control of the water George Kingsley fought to preserve.

“The merger is a bad idea,” said Robison, a Bertrand area farmer and Central irrigation customer. “No Central board member has been able to explain what benefit Central gets from this merger. The disapproval of the Kingsley family adds powerful support to the growing weight of opinion against the merger.”

Central initially challenged COTM's legal standing.

“Central said we didn't even have the right to oppose the merger or be heard,” Robison said. “The Power Review Board unanimously disagreed and ruled last December that COTM, which represents Central's irrigation customers, is statutorily entitled to challenge the merger.”

A three-day evidentiary hearing followed last February and COTM again prevailed. The Power Review Board dismissed the merger petition but granted Central leave to amend its charter and try again.

On Wednesday, July 27, Central announced its plan to vote on the merger again this Friday after postponing an earlier vote that had been scheduled for July 17. The vote is scheduled to occur during both the Gosper and Kearney County fairs. Central provided no explanation for the short notice for Friday's vote or the effect it may have on public participation in advance of a such an important and highly contested vote.

“I am not against Central, I am against the merger,” Robison said. “I firmly believe that Central has done a great job operating Central as a stand-alone irrigation district.”

Today, Robison said he is grateful for the increasing support his group has gained.

“When we first challenged Central's board over the wisdom of this merger, we were dismissed as a small group of misinformed farmers,” Robison said.

Since COTM filed its protest, it has picked up support and endorsements from the Central Water Users Board; the Tri-Basin NRD; the Phelps County Economic Development Corporation, the Holdrege Area Chamber of Commerce and both the Phelps and Kearney Board of Supervisors.

Robison said the support COTM received yesterday from the Kingsley family means a lot to his group.

“At times, we felt like we were on an island fighting to preserve the Kingsley legacy,” Robison said. “Central has faithfully delivered water to central Nebraska for over 80 years. We just want to keep it that way.”

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