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## Bill banning pipeline builders from using eminent domain clears committee

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FRANKFORT, KY (WAVE) - A bill banning developers from using eminent domain to build the Bluegrass Pipeline cleared a House committee Wednesday over concerns that it would hurt job creation.

The House Judiciary Committee sided with landowners, who packed a hearing room and said they should have the right to say no to developers seeking an easement for the pipeline.

"We simply want to say that (natural gas liquid pipelines), absent a move from this General Assembly to give those projects the power of eminent domain, don't have it," said Rep. John Tilley, D-Hopkinsville, who chairs the committee and sponsored House Bill 31.

Tulsa, Oklahoma-based Williams Co. has not used eminent domain to acquire easements for the project, but company officials have asserted their right to do so as a last resort.

The pipeline would enter Kentucky to the east of Cincinnati and cut through several counties before meeting up with an existing line southwest of Louisville. It would carry natural gas liquids to facilities near the Gulf of Mexico.

Williams last week said it had delayed the pipeline's scheduled opening by up to a year, from late 2015 to mid-to-late 2016.

Williams officials didn't testify because of a pending lawsuit against the company, Tilley said. But other members of the oil and gas industries did fight the bill, saying it has the unintended consequence of hurting future projects.

"Legislation targeting this specific project at this point could create a big barrier to growth and job creation," said Andrew McNeill of the Kentucky Oil and Gas Association. "We need to be able to transport our product to market."

Union workers also attended the hearing in support of the pipeline, which they say will provide jobs to Kentuckians. Lawmakers allowed three hours of testimony during two hearings before the vote.

Landowners said that they wanted the right to allow or deny Williams from acquiring easements.

"We were being told that the lobbyists were working against us, so we were trying to combat that and do the best we could on it," said Joe Boone, who land surveyors have asked about acquiring easement on his Nelson County property. "(The committee's vote) does give us hope, but there's a long way to go."

Tilley said he thought the House had enough votes to pass the bill next week.