Dakota Access pipeline protests are protecting life

The rosy dawn rises above a sea of tents and teepees across the land at the confluence of the Missouri and the Cannonball rivers. The sacred fire burns where native people and their allies gather to eat breakfast and share their stories. A Standing Rock Lakota Sioux guardian tends the fire. Small bags of cedar and tobacco are available to sprinkle on the flames as prayers are offered for the protection of the river and the sacred sites by these thousands of people who have gathered from 280 tribes on this barren, windy plain in North Dakota. Among the hundreds of tribal and international flags that line the entry path, I’m proud to see the Iowa flag. The power of drumming and ancient song and prayer is palpable and nearly constant. I’m here with four friends from Washington and New Mexico to “Stand with Standing Rock,” because water is life.

We are in awe of the energy of this community and relish the honor of being witness to this phenomenal moment. Supporters, dignitaries and allies have made their way here from around the world from such places as Ecuador, Italy, Australia, Denmark, Kenya — and on and on.

On this morning, a caravan transports roughly 300 people to prayerfully and peacefully interrupt the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline which is poised to drill under the Missouri River, threatening the water supply for the Lakota reservation and everyone who lives downstream. We participate in ceremonial, non-violent actions at two construction sites and briefly disrupt the machinery of the destructive “black snake” that was prophesied generations ago. Surveillance drones and helicopters watch us — and probably record our faces, so some of the “Red Warriors” cover their faces. “Warrior,” in the Lakota tradition, means “protector.” On this day, no one is threatened with dogs, mace or guns, as happened before and after this day, and no one is arrested. But that is always a possibility. In Iowa, we call this same pipeline the “Bakken,” named for the fracked oil fields in North Dakota where communities and the environment have been brutalized in the rush to extract oil. Gov. Terry Branstad, via his appointed three-person Iowa Utilities Board, approved the permit for this same pipeline across 18 counties in Iowa, taking precious Iowa farmland by eminent domain and threatening our soil and waterways across the state. This pipeline is not an Iowa utility, and except for temporary jobs — mostly for out-of-state union workers — and pocket change for local businesses along the route for a few months, it offers Iowa nothing but the threat of environmental and financial disaster. Energy Transfer Partners, a Texas corporation, expects to make a huge profit on the global market while Iowans bear the risks of inevitable oil spills.

On Saturday, I was arrested at “Mississippi Stand” down near Keokuk, where this same pipeline is being drilled under America’s mightiest river. At 3333 Mississippi River Road, you can see a dozen or so tents camped in the ditch where peaceful resistance is “Standing with Standing Rock.”

On Saturday, 30 peaceful water protectors, including six members of 100Grannies for a Livable Future from Iowa City, were cuffed and taken to jail after we attempted to “shut it down” using our voices and our bodies against the might of the private security, the highway patrol and the local sheriff’s department who are charged with protecting the success of the huge drilling machines and corporate profits.

Iowans must rise up now against this tyranny. They cannot stop thousands of us. If we do nothing, all is lost. Literally. No one else is going to protect our water, our soil, our planet. It is up to us. Water is life.

*Miriam Kashia is a North Liberty resident and a member of 100Grannies for a Livable Future.*



**Miriam Kashia**

Guest Opinion