

## **MY VIEW: Why I chose civil disobedience**

By Pramilla Malick

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In a recent story about the Sept. 13 primary elections, the Times Herald-Record ran a photograph of me being arrested. Now I'm asking for your vote. You deserve an explanation. What led a mother of four to engage in civil disobedience? When you've heard my story, I think you'll agree that I simply did what millions of moms do every day — I fought to protect the health and safety of my children.

What do you do when a billion-dollar company informs you that they will place a dangerous polluting facility in the middle of your pristine residential community, and further that there is nothing you can do about it? What do you do when all the environmental and public health laws that are supposed to protect you are not worth the paper they're written on because regulators lack the political will to enforce them? What do you do if you find conflicts of interest and corruption entrenched at every layer of government corroding every pillar of our democracy?

Five years ago my community of families, farmers and first responders in Minisink engaged the process faithfully to challenge the Minisink Compressor Station, only to face a rigged regulatory system that threw our constitutional and human rights into the dustbin. We compiled piles of scientific data on the health dangers associated with compressor stations and petitioned both our government and courts, only to be met with excuses, blank stares and indifference. Our state senator, the man I'm running against in this election, wasn't there for us either. We later came to learn that that he had taken campaign contributions from the project owner, Millennium Pipeline, and worse: his son's law firm was working for them!

The fix was in and the facility was built. My neighbor, a 9/11 first responder with lung damage, was forced to leave his home. Others were forced to walk away from their American dream. My own daughter began getting nosebleeds and headaches, and when a team of scientists came to assess the impacts, I learned that other children were experiencing similar symptoms, likely due to formaldehyde exposure, a known carcinogen.

Our basic right to clean air had been taken away from us. It was a fight or flight moment. I chose to fight.

But when the CPV Valley Power plant began construction I knew we were at a fork in the road. Our entire county was now facing imminent and irreversible industrialization and still, most impacted residents were not aware of the risks they would soon face. Having exhausted all other remedies, we knew we had to sound a very loud alarm before it was too late. So, along with college professors, an actor and grandmother, I blockaded the CPV Valley construction site and courted arrest. In the tradition of Gandhi and Martin Luther King we confronted injustice with peaceful humanity. Because we had been picketing the site for months, the officers on duty had come to know us. We could tell that they were reluctant to arrest us, but we all knew it was necessary. As I was escorted into the police car one of the officers thanked me and remarked, "You know we live here too."

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