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NC Government takes family's Chatham County land so foreign company can move in

By Brooke Medina

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Raleigh, NC – Two Chatham County communities will soon be without twenty-seven homes, five businesses, and one church because the state of North Carolina is exercising its eminent domain powers to make way for VinFast, a startup Vietnamese auto company.

Eminent domain is a legal tool that allows the government to take privately owned land by force in the event a property owner refuses to sell it voluntarily.

In March of 2022, after the Department of Commerce actively recruited VinFast, Gov. Roy Cooper announced the state was awarding the young company nearly \$1.25 billion in state and local taxpayer incentives over the next **three decades** (you read that right!) in an effort to incentivize their manufacture of a new fleet of electric vehicles (EVs).

The state government has promised VinFast thirty years of access to taxpayer money and land, making a bet on this startup's scalability and profitability, even though the company's U.S. market is still in its earliest infancy.

The state's egregious land grab on behalf of a private company has left residents out in the cold.

Oh, to have that much confidence and swagger in the midst of this current economic climate! I suppose it's easy enough to be brave when it's not your money or property at stake. As a small aside, it's worth noting that only 3% of North Carolinians own an EV and only 12.8% think they might buy one down the road.

The state's egregious land grab on behalf of a private company has left residents, like Lena Stone, – who has lived in her home for nearly five decades – out in the cold. Another family, the Sanderfords, have lived on their land for 70 years. "They're taking everything we got," Jack Sanderford told the Raleigh-based *News & Observer*.

Scott Lincicome from the Cato Institute highlighted the crony nature of forcibly seizing private land on behalf of a taxpayer-subsidized private entity on Twitter this weekend.

Without a constitutional amendment protecting residents from eminent domain seizures that favor politically-connected companies, the government can continue to legally upend the lives – and homes – of North Carolinians.

Last year, an eminent domain bill (HB 271) was sent to the state Senate's Rules and Operations Committee where it languishes. This bill would have allowed voters to amend our state constitution, preventing this sort of forceful seizure of private citizen's property on behalf of a government-favored, subsidized business.

Barring constitutionally enshrined protections against overreaching eminent domain practices, the fate of the Stones, the Sanderfords, and any other North Carolinian who owns property the government might take an interest in, is at the mercy of politicians and their corporate friends.