

TWIN OAKS — On the way to the clinic for continuing medical treatments the afternoon of Nov. 15, Lisa and Michael Mingus passed something on their narrow gravel road they've never seen before. After they returned home that evening, they learned it was a sign of something they really don't want to see — something that may force them out of their secluded retirement lodge north of Twin Oaks, almost to Colcord. "It was a convoy," Michael Mingus said. "A white van, and some other cars, and Channel 8 news from Tulsa, and that guy was out there I saw on the news later, the secretary ... Jim Reese. The 'convoy' was a tour to see the growth of the poultry industry in Delaware County organized by Oklahoma Secretary of Agriculture Jim Reese. There was a van carrying the state Agriculture Board members, Agriculture Department employees and guests, plus others who went along to see what the board would see. The tour preceded a community meeting in the town of Kansas that night, where residents gave the board an earful about the industry expansion and lack of state regulations or oversight to prevent the concentration of houses dropped in next to rural homes — all without notice. The Minguses suddenly are joining their 15 immediate neighbors and dozens of others in opposition to the building of any more poultry-house operations in Delaware County. Delaware County is now the main hub of broiler chicken production in Oklahoma with 151 active permits for 748 houses with the potential to house more than 19.6 million birds at any one time, according to Agriculture Department records. That is an amount equal to nearly one house per square mile in the 792-square-mile county, or 24,000 chickens per square mile. The state announced a suspension on issuing new poultry-house permits the first week of October, with the expansion in a lull for several weeks and community outrage at a peak. However, two permits for six new houses each were pending at the time. One was filed at the last minute before the suspension; one was rejected for missing paperwork but has come back for reconsideration. The Agriculture Board last week

agreed to consider whether to issue those permits at its Dec. 11 meeting in Oklahoma City. "We're going to have to be at that meeting," Michael Mingus said.

Six of the 12 houses would be permitted for construction within a quarter mile of his home, and he has serious concerns about impact on the air quality where he lives. "We moved here for the peace and quiet and for the clean air, for the quality of life," said Lisa Mingus, who for the past two years has been the main caretaker for her husband: a U.S. Marine Corps veteran, retired in 2008, who has nasopharyngeal cancer tied to his service in Afghanistan. He is one of thousands on the Veteran Administration's Open Burn Pit Registry. The pits, Michael Mingus said, essentially were landfills for the military bases and spoils of war. "They put everything in there and they burned it," he said. Toxins from the smoke have led to lifelong, in some cases terminal illnesses for veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Due to surgery and intense radiation treatments, Michael Mingus has been on a liquid diet for two years. "We're very careful about what he's exposed to," Lisa Mingus said. They tell the power company they cannot spray herbicides near their home, she said, and the utility has followed their wishes.

Michael Mingus was adamant that he doesn't want to be seen as "pulling the veteran card." The fact of his health is the only reason he brings it up. "My new normal is not what my life used to be, and that is just a fact," he said. "What we cannot afford is new things coming into the neighborhood that could risk my health." The house they've renovated is surrounded by dense trees they hope will protect them when the wind blows their direction from the chicken houses. They enjoy their secluded escape with its clean air and wildlife. They have three sons, two on their own and working in Tulsa and one at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah. Their home is meant to be an escape for their retirement and a place where their family gathers to escape the

pressures of city life. "It's home base for everybody," Michael Mingus said. They have family in Oregon, but they've stopped visiting because forest fires near there have become so common and the air is bad. Mingus said he has no objections to farming or small business but said the encroachment on neighbors forced by the huge chicken houses is something that should at least warrant public notice and public hearings so everyone in the area has a chance to voice concerns and make people aware of possible issues with their placement. "The sad thing is, if they do decide to let them build that and it affects the air quality or our water, we will have to move. It won't be an option," he said. And where on Earth would they go? "Exactly," he replied. Kelly Bostian 918-581-8357 [kelly.bostian@tulsaworld.com](mailto:kelly.bostian@tulsaworld.com)  
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