



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on April 21, 2014

Obama Finds Another Reason to Delay Keystone Pipeline

With President Obama's State Department [deciding on Friday](#) to delay further any decision on the Keystone XL Pipeline, his environmentalist supporters were overjoyed. Nearly everyone else saw it as a political stunt designed to put off the decision until after the election.

The State Department is using faintly plausible excuses for the additional delay: a lawsuit in Nebraska, and two and a half million e-mails in its inbox. But it's not deliberate, claimed an unnamed State Department spokesman:



We felt that given that we're a few weeks off from early May that we'd be in the best position to ask [the eight federal agencies involved in the decision-making process] to ... wait until they have an adequate foundation to make their judgments about the project.

There's no intent to delay the process. The intent is to be able to ensure that the analysis that we do is based on a route that is fundamental to our review process and that the analysis and the comments that we get from the interagency community are indeed relevant to the real project that could potentially move ahead.

Translation: The president asked us to come up with reasons he could hide behind to delay making a decision until after November. And we found two.

First, Nebraska legislators have been frustrated over the delays in completing Phase IV of the pipeline so they passed a law allowing Nebraska Governor Dave Heineman to use the power of eminent domain to clear the path for the pipeline through the state. Unfortunately some landowners saw this as a land grab, filed suit, and found a receptive ear in a judge who ruled the law as unconstitutional. This was just plausible enough for the State Department to call a halt, to wait until the Nebraska Supreme Court hears the case. Conveniently enough, that won't happen any earlier than January 2015, well past the November elections.

Second, environmentalists have been flooding the State Department with e-mails protesting the approval — some two and a half million of them at last count. And someone has to read those e-mails to determine if they have a legitimate gripe, or are just part of a huge tsunami provoked by greens to delay the decision into infinity.

This pleased the environmentalists, including Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune, who responded, "Any day without the Keystone XL pipeline is a good day because it means more dirty tar sands crude in the ground where it belongs."



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Brune is referring to the alleged increased pollution from refining that sticky tar into useable energy. Except that, on net, there will be less pollution if the oil is refined than if it stays in the ground because it will, over time, replace less-efficient coal-fired energy plants which tend to pollute more. In addition, TransCanada isn't going to let those reserves stay in the ground; they will simply move them to other refineries via rail.

The risks of shipping oil by rail car seem to have escaped the environmentalists despite the horrendous oil train disaster that leveled the Quebec town of Lac-Megantic last summer. As noted by the editorial board of *USA Today* at the time:

Environmentalists insist that blocking Keystone would limit or stop production of tar sands oil, but growing evidence suggests that won't happen. Not only are producers able to use trains, there are proposals to expand or re-purpose two existing Canadian pipelines that would carry tar sands oil either west to Pacific Rim markets or to the east. The Bakken oil [from North Dakota passing through Lac-Megantic] was headed for a refinery in eastern Canada....

As we've argued previously, Keystone deserves to be approved. It would provide a secure new source of crude for a nation that still imports about 36% of its oil. And if the pipeline is not built, the oil won't stay in the ground. It will find its way to other places by other means.

Environmentalists respond that pipelines are dangerous, too, and so any oil in the ground should stay in the ground. This is their agenda: no fossil fuel energy, no matter how safe or sound transporting it might be. With nearly 200,000 miles of oil and natural gas pipelines already perforating the country, with nary a leak (if there were one, the media would have been all over it like a blanket), the Keystone pipeline Phase IV of just 850 miles in the United States puts the proper perspective on the matter. This decision not to decide certainly appears to be a sop to the environmentalists.

Senator Mary Landrieu (D-La.) favors approval of the pipeline and was hoping that Obama would make the proper decision to approve before the election so that she could tout that in her tough reelection campaign. As it is, the decision leaves her vulnerable —and upset:

This decision is irresponsible, unnecessary and unacceptable. By making it clear that they will not move the process forward until there is a resolution [of the] lawsuit in Nebraska, the administration is sending a signal that the small minority who oppose the pipeline can tie up the process in court forever.

There are 42,000 jobs, \$20 billion in economic activity and North America's energy security at stake.

What's also at stake is her seat in the Senate in November. So, as chairwoman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, she has threatened to "take decisive action to get this pipeline permit approved." What that means exactly is unclear, except that this decision isn't helping her campaign.

There's Democrat Senator Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota, who, while not running for reelection in November, see this as an issue that could bite her when she does. North Dakota is the virtual epicenter of energy development in the country, and she knows on which side her bread is buttered. Said Heitkamp:

Once again, we're hearing more delays and more uncertainty over the Keystone XL pipeline. It's absolutely ridiculous that this well-over-five-year-long process is continuing for an undetermined



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amount of time. This most recent delay leaves everyone waiting in limbo — federal agencies, construction and energy workers and companies, state officials and Canada.

Complaints of political chicanery emanated from Republicans as well, including House Speaker John Boehner (Ohio) and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (Ky.). Said Boehner:

It's clear that there is little this administration isn't willing to sacrifice for politics....

There are no credible reasons to block this pipeline even one day more, and the House will continue to press the administration to move forward so we can put Americans back to work.

Echoed McConnell:

It is crystal clear that the Obama administration is simply not serious about American energy and American jobs. Here's the greatest shovel-ready project in America — one that could create thousands of jobs right away — but the President simply isn't interested. Apparently radical activists carry more weight than Americans desperate to get back on the job.

The Democrats are divided on the issue, while Republicans have consistently supported the pipeline. There are Democrats who are supported by labor unions who see the Keystone approval as important to their constituency. Last year the Senate voted 62-37 on a nonbinding amendment that called for the pipeline's approval.

And so, with this decision to use the Nebraska lawsuit and a couple of million e-mails as plausible reasons to delay further the Keystone XL pipeline, the president has managed to offend just about everyone with an interest in jobs and cheap energy, except his primary constituency: the environmentalists.

Photo of President Barack Obama: AP Images

A graduate of Cornell University and a former investment advisor, Bob is a regular contributor to The New American magazine and blogs frequently at www.LightFromTheRight.com, primarily on economics and politics. He can be reached at badelman@thenewamerican.com.



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