



Obama Vetoes Keystone Pipeline

As expected, President Obama has exercised his first of likely a number of vetoes now that he faces a Republican Congress. On Tuesday, Obama vetoed the Republicans' Keystone XL pipeline bill, setting the stage for an override vote that has little chance of passing.



Keystone XL is a pipeline designed to move oil from Canada to the Gulf Coast. Democrats and environmentalists have opposed construction of the pipeline, citing environmental concerns including climate change, even as the State Department released a report last year that determined that the pipeline would not worsen climate change. Republicans have long advocated for the pipeline, asserting that the project would create tens of thousands of jobs in the oil industry, and that the construction alone would have created 20,000 jobs.

Republicans were fully anticipating a presidential veto, and even before Obama used his veto power, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell had announced an override vote, which is expected no later than March 3.

Still, the president wasted no time. According to *Politico*, Obama's veto "was delivered within hours of the legislation arriving on his desk."

In his veto message, Obama said that the legislation was a GOP effort to "circumvent longstanding and proven processes for determining whether or not building and operating a cross-border pipeline serves the national interest."

Obama tried to justify his veto by adding, "The Presidential power to veto legislation is one I take seriously. But I also take seriously my responsibility to the American people."

Tuesday's veto marked the third in Obama's presidential career, and by far the most controversial. But it is not expected to be his last.

Politico writes, "Though Obama's three vetoes are thus far a record low since James Garfield's 200-day presidency, experts expect Obama's final two years to be packed with high-profile veto showdowns."

As observed by Gerhard Peters, co-founder of the University of California-Santa Barbara's American Presidency Project, President Obama has until now had the luxury of a Democratic majority in the Senate. But with Republicans in control of both chambers, Obama is likely to exercise his veto power a lot more. "President Obama is in his last two years, not up for any election again, and I think he can give the Democrats, a number of them in the Senate, political cover," Peters said.



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Naturally, Obama's veto was applauded by environmental groups. "President Obama said he'd veto this attack on his executive authority, and he kept his word," Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune said. "That's what he said he'd do from the start, but Republicans in Congress continued to waste everyone's time with a bill destined to go nowhere, just to satisfy the agenda of their big oil allies."

One would think that passage of Keystone XL would also meet with the Sierra Club's approval, as well, for several reasons: Wealthier countries and populaces generally protect their environment better than poorer ones; Sierra Club executives and members inevitable all use petroleum products (unless they are living "off the grid"); and pipelines are a proven safe method of transporting oil.

Even as Republicans knew that the president would surely use his veto powers for this legislation, they still expressed disappointment at his actions. "I'm not shocked obviously," Senate Energy and Natural Resources Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) said. "I'm disappointed because I think the president is missing an opportunity when it comes to jobs and North American energy independence."

Politico reports that Republicans accused Obama of "bowing to an extremist green agenda that would rob the U.S. of thousands of construction jobs and other economic benefits." The Senate GOP Conference sent out a statement on Tuesday that labeled Obama as the "Obstructor in Chief."

Throughout the debate over the Keystone XL pipeline, there was indeed clear evidence that the Obama administration had been interested solely in catering to environmental groups on the subject. [E-mails](#) obtained under a Freedom of Information Act request reveal that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has been plotting with environmental groups to kill the Keystone XL pipeline. The request was filed by the Energy and Environmental Legal Institute. Lawmakers indicated that the e-mails were "damning."

One communication revealed Lena Moffit of the Sierra Club writing to three senior policy staffers at the EPA, including Michael Goo, then the associate administrator for policy, on the subject of the Keystone XL pipeline.

An e-mail from Moffit to Alex Barron, EPA senior advisor in the Office of Policy, acknowledges a strategy session that took place the day before with the agency officials: "Thanks so much for taking the time to meet with us on Keystone XL yesterday.... I know this is a tough issue but please do let me know if I can be helpful in any way — particularly in further identifying those opportunities for EPA to engage that don't involve 'throwing your body across the tracks,' as Michael put it."

Lawmakers seized upon the e-mails as evidence of assertions they have been making all along. Senator John Barrasso (R-Wyo.) told [Fox News](#), "Despite the fact that Keystone XL has bipartisan support in Congress and from governors, environmental extremists inside and out of the administration are working behind closed doors to kill it.... These damning emails make it clear that the Obama administration has been actively trying to stop this important project for years."

And with President Obama's veto, it appears that the subject may be all but dead for the moment. But House Speaker John Boehner vows that the Republicans will not give up the fight.

The likelihood of a successful override vote is slim as Republicans would need to obtain 20 more Democratic votes in the House and four in the Senate.

Still, Canada's Natural Resources Minister Greg Rickford remains hopeful that the pipeline will eventually be built. "It is not a question of if this project will be approved; it is a matter of when." He added, "This is not a debate between Canada and the U.S.; it's a debate between the President and the



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American people, who are supportive of the project.”

Likewise, TransCanada — the pipeline developer — states it is still “fully committed” to Keystone XL, reiterating that the pipeline meets Obama’s demands that it not worsen climate change, as observed by the State Department in its 2014 environmental analysis on the pipeline.

In fact, the State Department noted that other options of getting oil from Canada to the Gulf Coast are generally worse for the environment, a point that was revisited by TransCanada’s CEO Russ Girling who pointed to statistics showing that pipelines are a safer way to transport oil than rail, barge, or truck. “While groups opposed to the safe and sustainable transportation of products such as oil by pipeline may try to claim a symbolic victory, it’s important to focus on what is at stake,” Girling said in a statement.



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