

# North Dakota Governor orders “emergency evacuation” of Dakota Access pipeline protest site

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On Monday, Republican governor of North Dakota Jack Dalrymple ordered the evacuation of the protesters blocking the completion of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) at the Oceti Sacowan camp outside the town of Cannonball. State officials, including the Army Corps of Engineers, have denied that they are seeking the “forcible removal” of protestors from the campsites, which have sheltered more than 5,000 protestors since August.

The protesters are fighting against the \$3.8 billion Dakota Access Pipeline, which will pump 500,000 barrels of crude oil a day from the Bakken production region of North Dakota to an existing pipeline in Patoka, Illinois, a distance of 1,170 miles. Activists say the pipeline disturbs historical and cultural sites and can potentially contaminate the Missouri River.

The Army Corps of Engineers released a letter the day after Thanksgiving warning protesters that all federal land north of the Cannonball River would be closed to public access for “safety concerns” after December 5. Native American activists were quick to point out the bitter irony of the letter being sent after Thanksgiving, the traditional American holiday celebrating friendship between Native Americans and immigrants fleeing persecution from Europe.

December 5 is also the birthday of General George Armstrong Custer, who died in the Battle of Little Big Horn when he and a force of American cavalry were annihilated by a coalition of Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapaho Indians.

Activists are determined to make a stand and have made clear they are not leaving. The Army Corps of Engineers has warned that anyone remaining at the campsites after December 5 would be considered

“trespassing.” After a huge public outcry, the Army was forced to state they are “seeking a peaceful and orderly transition to a safer location.”

Governor Dalrymple’s emergency declaration stated the camp is “not zoned for dwellings suitable for living in winter conditions, and also [does] not possess proper permanent sanitation infrastructure to sustain a living environment consistent with proper public health.”

The governor also complained of “the inability to effectively provide emergency, medical, fire response services, and law enforcement services.”

That most of the protesters, the impoverished and working class natives of North America, have been forced onto reservations that do not “to sustain a living environment consistent with proper public health” for generations before anyone had ever heard of the Dakota Access Pipeline is, of course, no concern to the federal government.

The harsh North Dakota winters and the entirely unconvincing concern for “public health” are but the pretexts to remove the final human barriers to complete the pipeline.

In a language echoing the segregationists of the Old South, authorities have blamed outside agitators for fomenting unrest between protesters and police. Col. John Henderson, commander of the Army Corps’ Omaha district told the *Los Angeles Times*, “Unfortunately, it is apparent that more dangerous groups have joined this protest and are provoking conflict in spite of the public pleas from tribal leaders,” adding, “We are working to transition those engaged in peaceful protest from this area and enable law enforcement authorities to address violent or illegal acts as appropriate to protect public safety.”

In reality, the only ones engaged in provoking conflict and violence are the police and National Guard, who have arrested more than 525 people since August. Water cannon have been used in freezing temperatures as well as tear gas, rubber bullets, and concussion grenades, which have seriously injured 17 demonstrators since last week's confrontation, which saw 21-year-old Sophia Wilansky brutally injured with the likely loss of her arm.

Wilansky's father denounced the police violence in an emotional press conference outside the Minnesota hospital where she was airlifted, saying, "Intentionally an officer threw a grenade that exploded right as it hit her forearm." He added, "This is not Afghanistan. It's not Iraq. We don't throw grenades at people."

When Mandan police chief Jason Ziegler was asked by the *Bismarck Tribune* if the use of extreme force was justified against protestors, he replied cynically, "It was effective. Wasn't it?"

While the authorities have backed off from threats of physical removal, a "free speech zone" is being proposed just south of the Cannonball River. On Tuesday, North Dakota officials announced that they will impose heavy fines on those bringing supplies into the campsite. Earlier, officials had warned of a physical blockade of the campsite but have since backed away from that threat.

Police have been told to stop any vehicles entering the camp and inform drivers they are committing an infraction and could be fined up to \$1,000.

Also this week, the National Lawyers Guild has filed a class action lawsuit on behalf of injured protestors against the police forces of Morton and Stutsman counties. The lawsuit claims police used excessive force against protestors including water cannon and tear gas without any clear warning to disperse. The lawsuit is seeking compensatory damages.

The Obama administration has also released a perfunctory statement through White House spokesman Josh Earnest saying police have "an obligation" to show restraint and protestors have a "responsibility" to refrain from violence. Once again, President Obama has equated the peaceful protestors with the vicious actions of the police and National Guard.

In another significant development, up to 2,000 American military veterans are expected to join the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation as early as next

week. The group is called "Veterans Stand for Standing Rock" and is planning a nonviolent demonstration against the "assault and intimidation at the hands of the militarized police force."

The group had originally hoped for 500 veterans to sign up on its Facebook account but had to stop sign-ups once they reached the 2,000-number limit. An online fundraiser has earned more than \$570,000 in pledges. Organizers encouraged attendees to wear their old uniforms and in a break from military custom will have a "chain of responsibility," not a chain of command. There will be no ranks, and veterans will refer to one another by name.

North Dakota State Highway Patrol Lt. Thomas O. Iverson wrote in an e-mail to the *New York Times*, "Law enforcement is aware of the upcoming event planned for December 4-7," adding, "If the group remains lawful and refrains from blocking the roadway, there will be no issues."



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