

Dakota Access pipeline construction to proceed

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On Tuesday, the United States Army Corps of Engineers filed documents with the US District Court in Washington, DC stating that it intends to grant an easement to Energy Transfer Partners (ETP) so that it can move forward with the completion of the Dakota Access pipeline. It also notified the Senate of its filings, stating that construction is expected to begin today. Only a court injunction can now officially block the construction.

The approved site will carry the pipeline under Lake Oahe, a reservoir on the Missouri River, which supplies the adjacent Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's drinking water. The Standing Rock Sioux have opposed the pipeline, citing fears of drinking water contamination and damage to sacred sites.

This marks the final hurdle needed for ETP to complete the 1,170 mile pipeline, which will carry crude oil from North Dakota to refineries on the Gulf of Mexico. The Obama administration ordered a halt to the project in December by calling for an environmental review; President Donald Trump wasted no time in issuing an order of his own directing the Army to expedite construction.

The pipeline has been the focus of intense clashes between protesters, the Army Corps of Engineers and law enforcement. Popular opposition to the pipeline and to the US government's dismissal of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's concerns drew tens of thousands of protesters to the site in the fall of 2016.

A coordinated response of local law enforcement and the Army National Guard aimed at driving away protestors resulted in several serious injuries to protesters, among them hypothermia, traumatic brain injury and burns. Six hundred protesters were arrested.

With the deepening of winter, the number of protesters has decreased to around 1,000, most of them

concentrated in a camp on land owned by the Army Corps. The protesters there have vowed to stay, despite the fact that the camp is situated on a flood plain and other camps have been cleared. A group of veterans opposed to the pipeline has vowed to send more protesters as the tension over the planned construction heightens.

The concerns expressed by the Standing Rock Tribe are well founded. Three major pipeline spills occurred in the United States in October 2016. Through the course of the year, well over 200 pipeline leaks or ruptures occurred. Over 3,000 spills occurred in the United States between 2006 and 2016, costing \$4.7 billion. Many pipelines are aging, causing these incidents to occur more and more frequently. Considering the Army Corps' poor record in maintaining even the simplest infrastructure entrusted to it, the pipeline's placement in the reservoir is almost a guarantee of disaster for the Missouri River and those depending upon it for drinking water.

Despite a well-documented history of poor management and hazards of such pipelines, the Dakota Access Pipeline has enjoyed bipartisan support in both the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Democratic Senator Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota praised the corps' decision and denounced the "continued delays and stalling tactics" of the Obama administration, and stated, "...it's crucial that all parties double down in their resolve to listening and working together." She did not mention how those opposed to the pipeline, most especially the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, might be heard over the din of sound cannons and water cannons employed by law enforcement in the service of ETP and other stakeholders in the project.

John Hoeven, a Republican senator from North Dakota who chairs the Senate Indian Affairs

Committee, similarly crowed over the Corps' statement, claiming that it represented a victory for the economic wellbeing of his constituency. He has consistently characterized the protesters as violent public enemies. Although he chairs the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, he has dismissed the pleas and demands of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe.

While Obama enjoyed accolades for his halting of construction, he essentially succeeded, not in stopping the construction all together, but in merely interrupting its progress. He left its fate in the hands of Trump, who vociferously supported the pipeline during the presidential campaign.

Trump wasted no time; one of his very first acts as president was to issue an executive order demanding that the Corps act expeditiously to ensure that construction went forward. The Corps complied with haste.

The Standing Rock tribe has vowed to fight the pipeline's construction legally, and several protesters have likewise stated that they intend to fight the pipeline's construction. As the protests wore on in 2016, gaining widespread popular support, shares of ETP declined in value. Yet on Tuesday, with the announcement of the Corps' intention to grant its easement, the stock finished the day with a 20 cent uptick.

Prior to his election, Trump owned a significant stake in ETP. He has declined since then to provide any paperwork to demonstrate that he has divested from the company. Senator Hoeven owns shares in several oil wells in North Dakota, all of which stand to profit from the pipeline's construction.

Just across the state's northern border, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has hailed the pipeline as an economic boon to Canada's petroleum industry. While Trudeau has postured as a champion of indigenous rights and of the environment, his support of the Dakota Access pipeline, along with those proposed in Canada, belies the hollowness of liberal bourgeois pretexts internationally.

Obama's disingenuous tactics notwithstanding, the Democrats have fallen into formation behind the petroleum industry. Their eyes will continue to stay fixed upon the rising cost of ETP shares, not upon the human costs associated with the pipeline.



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