

Protests in Bay Area Send President Obama Clear Message on Keystone XL Pipeline: NO!

by Tina Gerhardt

Mass demonstrations welcomed President Obama to the Bay Area today and sent him a clear message on the Keystone XL Pipeline: Just say NO!

President Obama arrived in San Francisco's well-heeled Pacific Heights neighborhood at the home of former hedge fund manager turned environmental campaigner to host a \$5000 per person cocktail hour followed by a \$32,500 / plate dinner fundraiser at the home of Ann and Gordon Getty for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

Organized by CREDO Action in conjunction with environmental organizations such as 350.org, Center for Biological Diversity, Friends of the Earth, Idle No More, Rising Tide SF and the Sierra Club, over 1000 protesters greeted President Obama.

The protest forms part of a rising national movement that plans to dog the president and keep pressure on him not to authorize the Keystone XL Pipeline.

On Friday, March 19, 2013, the U.S. Senate voted 62-37 to pass the pipeline. But the vote is largely symbolic. The fate of the Keystone XL Pipeline lies with President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry, who have ultimate say in its future.



"It's not a matter of if spills will occur on dangerous pipelines like the Keystone XL, but rather, when -- and at what cost to Americans," said Michael Brune of the Sierra Club. (Photo courtesy of Credomobile)

Activists intend to keep the pressure on. As Rose Braz, Campaign Director at the Center for Biological Diversity told The Progressive in an interview: "The climate crisis should confront President Obama anywhere he goes. The president has asked us to compel him to do the right thing on climate change, so we'll be there in force when he visits San Francisco to urge him to reject the dirty Keystone Pipeline."

In February, over 40,000 persons rallied in Washington D.C. to urge the present to vote against the new 875-mile long pipeline, which

would transport oil from the U.S.-Canadian border through Montana and South Dakota to connect with an existing pipeline near Steele City, Nebraska for onward delivery to refineries in Texas. It would run over the Ogallala Aquifer, which extends from south Dakota to northern Texas and provides fresh drinking water to millions in the Midwest.

The pipeline would also threaten endangered area wildlife, including western prairie fringed orchids, whooping cranes, piping plovers, Arkansas River shiners, pallid sturgeon, American burrowing beetles and woodland caribou.

Last Friday, the Pegasus pipeline that ruptured in Mayflower, Arkansas and has been classified by the Environmental Protection Agency as a “major spill” dumped vast quantities of oil in neighborhoods and made clear the risks associated with a tar sands pipeline.

The Pegasus pipeline carries diluted bitumen (dilbit), a combination of crude in the form bitumen and chemicals used to make it easier - that is more liquid or diluted - to transport. The dilbit originates in the tar sands of Alberta, Canada, just as the oil that the Keystone XL Pipeline would transport would originate. (Click [here](#) for a Dilbit Primer.)

To extract petroleum from tar sands requires vast quantities of water. In addition to the wasted freshwater and the hazards, some to date undetermined and unknown, associated with dilbit, tar sands development produces greenhouse gas emissions two to three times higher than those associated with conventional oil and gas operations.

The Pegasus pipeline transports dilbit from Patoka, Illinois to refineries in Nederland, Texas. Initial estimates of gallons leaked were

45,000 barrels or 189,000 gallons. Within a day, they reached 12,000 barrels or 504,000 gallons.

Twenty-two homes have been evacuated. The oil continues to gush down streets of area neighborhood and subdivisions and to coat residents’ backyards. It is coating area wildlife, including birds, as well as fish, such as bass, catfish, bream and crappie. Efforts are underway to avoid the spill from contaminating nearby Lake Conway, the area’s source of clean drinking water.

According to InsideClimate, Exxon is Running the Show, not federal agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Agency, and Exxon is not allowing journalists into the affected areas.

In response, Michael Brune, Sierra Club stated, “This latest toxic mess is just another reminder that oil companies cannot be trusted to transport toxic tar sands crude through Americans’ backyards, farmlands and watersheds. It’s not a matter of if spills will occur on dangerous pipelines like the Keystone XL, but rather, when -- and at what cost to Americans.”

As Emma Pullman at DeSmogBlog lays out in an infographic, the Keystone XL Pipeline predicted it would leak once every seven years. Yet since it began operation in June 2010, it has leaked 14 times.

The Arkansas spill comes two days after a train, also carrying Canadian crude, derailed in Parkers Prairie, in western Minnesota, spilling around 15,000 gallons of crude oil.

These two recent accidents follow on the heels of two massive spills, in 2010, when an Enbridge pipeline leaked 100,000 gallons of crude into the Kalamazoo River; and in 2011, when an Exxon pipeline dumped 42,000 gallons of oil into the Yellowstone River, for which Exxon was hit by a \$1.7 million fine last week.

Ross Hammond, Friends of the Earth Senior Campaigner with the Climate and Energy Program, told The Progressive, “President Obama actually has the power to cancel this project. It is all risks, no rewards. It does not help the U.S. at all. There has been so much propaganda about this pipeline, that it is going to lead to U.S. oil independence and create all these jobs. But the State Department itself thinks it will create only 35 permanent jobs. We are here to urge President Obama to cancel this project. It is going to unlock an enormous carbon bomb.”

As Bill McKibben, co-founder of 350.org, put it in an interview with The Progressive, “the President needs to constantly be reminded that Americans, unlike oil executives, are ready to back him if he’ll be the first world leader to say no to a big project on climate grounds.”

CREDO recently launched a call to activists to pledge to risk arrest in an act of civil disobedience if President Obama moves forward with a plan to approve the Keystone XL pipeline. Over 53,000 people have signed the pledge to risk arrest in peaceful dignified civil disobedience in their local communities, in front of OFA meetings, State Department offices, TransCanada’s corporate lobbies, banks that are financing tar sands oil development, areas ravaged by Hurricane Sandy and along the pipeline route.

350.org is calling for people to take action and to submit comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement released on March 1, 2013. A public meeting is also scheduled for Thursday, April 18, 12:00 - 3:30 pm and 4:00 - 8:00 pm at the Heartland Events Center, 700 East Stolley Park Road, Grand Island, Nebraska. The State Department is accepting public comments on the new proposal until April 22: http://act.350.org/letter/a_million_strong_against_keystone/ and also <http://www.keystonepipeline-xl.state.gov/>.