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Obama Voters to Obama: Reject Keystone XL



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Here's a wake-up call for the White House: A new poll finds that most people who voted for President Obama in November oppose the controversial Keystone XL pipeline.

The numbers are striking, and if this was an election, it'd be a clear mandate. Some 68 percent of Obama voters oppose building the pipeline, 76 percent are concerned about its contribution to climate change, and 57 percent believe approval would break the president's State of the Union vow to fight climate change.

The national poll was conducted by Public Policy Polling on March 15, 16 and 17. It included 1,122 voters of all kinds and 536 people who voted for Obama in the 2012 election. The poll has a margin of error of + or - 2.9 percent.

The poll of Obama voters also found that 61 percent said they'd feel "disappointed" or "betrayed" if the president approves Keystone and that 69 percent said Obama's legacy should be about clean-energy innovation and solving climate change rather than expanding oil, gas and natural gas production.

The question now is whether the president will heed the call - and the tens of thousands

of people who marched on the White House earlier this year - or give into the oil industry's wishes.

But before Obama makes his Keystone decision, Congress may have its say, possibly as early as this week as the U.S. Senate hammers out the national budget.

The new poll has something for that too: A majority of Americans (53 percent) say they oppose any congressional intervention in the Keystone issue.

Assuming Congress keeps its hands off Keystone - not a foregone conclusion, by the way - Keystone will eventually find its way to Obama's desk.

Few issues will define Obama's ultimate environmental legacy like climate change and the decision over whether to approve Keystone, which would transport tar sands oil from Canada to Texas through a 1,700-mile pipeline.

The list of downsides to the Keystone project is long and troubling.

The proposed pipeline would, every day, carry up to 35 million gallons of oil strip-mined from Canada's "tar sands" -- some of the dirtiest fuels on the planet. The pipeline would cross the heart of the Midwest and deliver oil to the Gulf of Mexico, where most of it would

be exported to other countries. Along the way the pipeline would cut through rivers, streams and prime habitat for at least 20 endangered species, including whooping cranes and pallid sturgeon.

The mining of Alberta's tar sands is also destroying tens of thousands of acres of boreal forest and polluting hundreds of millions of gallons of water from the Athabasca River, in the process creating toxic ponds so large they can be seen from space.

Extraction and refinement of tar-sands oil produces two times more greenhouse gases per barrel than conventional oil and represents a massive new source of fossil fuel pollution that leading climate scientist Dr. James Hansen has called "game over" for our ability to avoid climate catastrophe.

TransCanada's existing Keystone I pipeline has reportedly leaked 14 times since it went into operation in June 2010, including one spill of 24,000 gallons. The State Department's environmental reviews have pointed out that spills from Keystone XL are likely to occur, estimating that there could be as many as about 100 spills over the course of the pipeline's lifespan.

Obama faces a stark and monumental choice when it comes to Keystone XL. It's clear what the people who put him in the White House want him to do - and what's the right decision for future generations whose survival will depend on clean, livable planet.