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Poll: Majority of Americans Want Congress Out of Keystone XL Pipeline Decision, Oppose "Eminent Domain," Worry About Water, Wildlife

Obama Voters Strongly Opposed to Keystone; Strong Majority Would Feel Betrayed or Disappointed if Approved

WASHINGTON— With the U.S. Senate poised to vote on the Keystone XL pipeline this week, a new national poll commissioned by the Center for Biological Diversity finds that a majority of Americans oppose Congressional intervention requiring the construction of the 1,700-mile oil pipeline from Canada to Texas. A majority also oppose the use of "eminent domain" — taking private property without landowner approval — and are concerned about the pipeline's impact on water and wildlife.

Opposition was particularly strong among those who voted for President Barack Obama last year: 68 percent 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.

"President Obama promised to steer America toward a safer, saner energy policy that doesn't sacrifice our climate and wildlife for oil company profits," said Kierán Suckling, the Center's executive director. "It's clear that most Obama voters believe this promise requires the president to reject the Keystone pipeline."

The Senate this week is expected to consider placement of a rider on the "continuing resolution" funding bill, which would force approval of the Keystone XL pipeline. If passed, the rider would short-circuit the State Department's detailed environmental, economic and social-justice review, as well as its decision-making authority.

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.

Among the results from the poll of all voters:

- 53 percent** said Congress should not pass legislation requiring that Keystone XL be built right away.
- 62 percent** said private property should not be taken by eminent domain to build the Keystone pipeline.
- 55 percent** said they are "very concerned" or "somewhat concerned" about the project's impact on water and wildlife.

"Americans take a pretty dim view of Congress, and most don't want it anywhere near the Keystone project," said Jerry Karnas, field director at the Center. "Keystone XL is a dangerous project for wildlife, climate and our environment. It deserves to be carefully considered by those who understand the long-term impacts, not hastily decided by politicians who're easily swayed by the oil industry's army of lobbyists."

Among the results from the poll of Obama voters:

- 74 percent** said the project is not in the "best interest" of the United States.
- 68 percent** said they disapproved of Keystone.
- 76 percent** said they were "very concerned" or "somewhat concerned" about Keystone's environmental impacts.
- 76 percent** said they were "very concerned" or "somewhat concerned" about its impacts on climate change.

Obama voters also indicated the president's legacy and trustworthiness are at stake in the Keystone decision:

- 61 percent** said they'd feel "disappointed" or "betrayed" if the president approves Keystone.
- 57 percent** said approval would break the president's State of the Union vow to reduce the threat of global warming.
- 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.

Background

The proposed Keystone XL 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.