

Pipeline Supporters, Opponents Rally in Nebraska

GRANT SCHULTE, Associated Press



LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Dueling protesters tangled during a raucous hearing in Nebraska on Tuesday over a proposed Canadian oil pipeline that opponents say could harm U.S. drinking water — a claim that supporters say is unfounded and offered by fear-mongering environmental groups.

U.S. State Department officials received an earful from supporters and opponents of the 1,700-mile Keystone XL pipeline that would cross part of Nebraska's vast underground water supply as it moved tar sands oil from Alberta, Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. Adversaries booed, jeered and shouted encouragement to their allies at the federal hearing in downtown Lincoln.

Environmental groups fear the pipeline is being rushed toward federal approval and will eventually leak, fouling underground and surface water supplies, increasing air pollution around refineries, and disrupting wildlife habitats. They have criticized what they consider inadequate pipeline safety and emergency spill responses, and accused company officials of bullying some landowners with pressure tactics to get their land.

Calgary-based TransCanada, which would operate the pipeline, says the \$7 billion project would meet strict environmental standards, including 57 conditions above those required by industry standards.

Dr. Amanda McKinney, a southeast Nebraska physician who stood at President

Pipeline Supporters, Opponents Rally in Nebraska

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

Barack Obama's side in 2009 to tout his health care initiative in Washington, D.C., said the decision will reflect his administration's priorities.

"If this administration cares about the health of these people, then it must stop this pipeline," McKinney said. "We cannot afford to spill this toxic tar sands oil into our soil or groundwater."

The hearing marked the second day of hearings this week in the six states the pipeline route will cross. The debate has drawn the greatest attention in Nebraska, where the proposed route would cross part of the Ogallala Aquifer, which supplies drinking water to about 2 million people.

Many of the more than 200 speakers who signed up to share an opinion fell into one of two camps: Business and union representatives who say the project will create tens of thousands of jobs, pitted against environmentalists, landowners and others who said they were concerned about possible leaks.

McKinney said the jobs touted by pipeline supporters "would be better utilized building wind turbines and solar panels."

Industry officials said the fears are based on misleading information.

"We don't have the luxury of taking philosophical stances on visions of what things would be like if oil and gasoline weren't interwoven so tightly in our daily lives," said Mark Whitehead, president of the Nebraska Petroleum Marketers and Convenience Store Association. "The fact is, petroleum has done more to improve our standard of living over the last century than any single innovation."

Robert Jones, the TransCanada vice president in charge of the Keystone XL pipeline project, said environmental fears about the project are unfounded.

Jones said pipeline technology improvements since 1970 have reduced the chance for leaks, and a direct hit from a backhoe would not puncture the pipe. He said the company voluntarily plans to treat the Sandhills region as a high-consequence area, similar to a heavily populated city and subject to more frequent safety checks.

The sides staged dueling rallies in front of the Pershing Center with signs, songs and a black, inflatable mock pipe that opponents hauled down the street.

Pipeline supporters in bright orange waved signs outside the Pershing Center that read, "Keystone Unlocks Good Jobs for Nebraska," and "Reason, Not Extremism." Opponents sported red Husker t-shirts with black arm bands and flashed "Protect the Sandhills" signs.

Some handed out shirts that said, "But Dad, our cows can't drink oil." Inside the arena, where signs were banned, one opponent used her speaking time to read a six-stanza poem: "Behold! A Pipeline Cometh!"

Pipeline opponent Dan Rudnick of Lincoln said he'd like to see state and federal

Pipeline Supporters, Opponents Rally in Nebraska

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

action to at least reroute the pipeline around the Ogallala Aquifer.

Nebraska State Sen. Ken Haar urged officials to take more time to consider the project or reject it outright. Haar, an outspoken pipeline critic, drew a standing ovation after he spoke. When his time ended, pipeline supporters shouted, "Time's up!"

"With all due respect to this committee, I would say today that the national interest is being defined by the federal government and TransCanada, and that you don't give a damn about Nebraska," he said to loud whistles and applause.

Nebraska State Sen. Jim Smith, a pipeline supporter, said the proposed route is the safest, most efficient and most environmental of all pathways considered. As he finished, protesters shouted: "Shame on you!"

Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman has urged Obama and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to deny a federal permit for the pipeline, which would carry Canadian oil through part of the Ogallala Aquifer that also supplies drinking and irrigation water to South Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas. Heineman, a Republican, said he would support the pipeline project if TransCanada moved its route.

The State Department, which must approve the pipeline because it would cross the U.S.-Canada border, is expected to decide by the end of the year.

Despite reassurances, the project has become a flashpoint for environmental groups, who say the pipeline would bring "dirty oil" that requires huge amounts of energy to extract and could cause an ecological disaster in case of a spill.

Opponents have urged Obama to block the project as a sign he is serious about reducing greenhouse gas emissions blamed for global warming.

Environmental activists, including actress Daryl Hannah and NASA scientist James Hansen, have been arrested in ongoing protests outside the White House during the past two weeks.

Supporters say the pipeline has received a vigorous three-year federal review that has uncovered no major concerns. They argue that the pipeline will create thousands of construction jobs and reduce the nation's dependence on Middle East oil.

"It's going to come from somewhere," said John Blasingame, who trains unionized pipe workers in Omaha. "Nobody's willing to give up their automobile. None of these people who are against the pipeline are willing to give up their automobile."

Source URL (retrieved on 07/24/2014 - 10:02am):

http://www.chem.info/news/2011/09/pipeline-supporters-opponents-rally-nebraska?qt-most_popular=0

Pipeline Supporters, Opponents Rally in Nebraska

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)
