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Lawmakers Oppose Canadian Pipeline

By **ELISABETH ROSENTHAL**

Facing a decision on a proposed pipeline to bring Canadian crude [oil](#) to the United States, the Obama administration is confronting growing resistance from politicians who oppose the project or, at the very least, urge further study before approval.

The massive pipeline, known as Keystone XL, would allow [Canada](#) to export an additional 1.1 million barrels a day of oil to the United States. The United States currently imports 1.9 million barrels a day from Canada. Canadian [oil sands](#) are expected to become America's primary source of imported oil this year.

While Canadian oil represents a plentiful source of fossil fuel from a friendly neighbor, it poses [environmental dilemmas](#): much of Canada's oil is extracted from oil sands in a process that releases higher levels of heat-trapping gases than conventional oil drilling in the United States. In addition, extracting oil from oil sands — also called tar sand — damages the local environment by creating toxic sludge ponds and destroying large areas of boreal forest.

Last month, 50 members of Congress sent a letter to Secretary of State [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#) expressing concerns about the pipeline. Representative [Henry A. Waxman](#), Democrat of California and chairman of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, reiterated those concerns in [a letter](#) released by his office on Tuesday.

"This pipeline is a multibillion-dollar investment to expand our reliance on the dirtiest source of transportation fuel currently available," he wrote in the letter, dated last Friday. "While I strongly support the president's efforts to move America to a clean energy economy, I am concerned that the Keystone XL pipeline would be a step in the wrong direction."

Mrs. Clinton is charged with reaching a decision on whether to permit Keystone XL under an executive order that gives the State Department authority to approve transboundary pipelines based on considerations of "national interest."

In April, the State Department released a draft environmental assessment about Keystone XL.

A public comment period recently ended, and over the next few months other federal agencies will be able to weigh in.

In his letter, Mr. Waxman complained primarily that the gas emissions produced by oil extraction in Canada were not considered in the environmental impact assessment.

For the moment, the United States is the primary customer for oil from oil sands, and without Keystone XL, the growth of that industry could be limited. Canada is ultimately planning to build a domestic pipeline to move the oil to its west coast so it can also be exported to Asian countries, primarily China.

Two prior pipelines to bring oil from oil sands to the United States have been approved by the State Department in past years with little public discussion. But with [President Obama](#) pledging to reduce the nation's dependence on fossil fuels and with oil pouring into the Gulf of Mexico from BP's damaged well, such decisions have taken on new significance.

"Decisions that were previously left to midlevel bureaucrats are now rising to the highest political level," said Kenny Bruno, the United States coordinator for the [No Tar Sands Oil coalition](#), an alliance of environmental and indigenous groups. "President Obama has done some very good things on issues like energy efficiency. But if he approves this pipeline, it would be a clear two steps back."