(Reuters) - Republicans in Congress signaled on Wednesday that they plan to keep the Keystone XL pipeline alive as a tool for skewering President Barack Obama on jobs, the top political issue ahead of the 2012 elections.

The Canada-to-Texas pipeline has been vociferously opposed by environmental groups, including the Sierra Club and the Natural Resources Defense Council, who had threatened to make it an election issue.

In the Senate, 37 Republicans backed a bill that would require the Obama administration to allow work to begin on the pipeline within 60 days of passage, a schedule that will be difficult to achieve in the Democratic-controlled body.

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