

No more 'studies' to delay the proven Keystone XL

By Rep. Lee Terry

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President Obama has a decision to make. With the swift approval of one project that science has proved time and time again to be safe, our country has the opportunity to put more than 20,000 unemployed Americans back to work, pour hundreds of millions of dollars into our economy annually, and safely transport 830,000 barrels of North American oil daily from Alberta, Canada, through Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota and Nebraska to refineries located on the Gulf Coast. The Keystone XL pipeline has the potential to change the direction of our economy.

Instead, the White House has requested Congress and the American people to remain patient as the State Department reviews reports, studies and impact statements it had already deemed adequate when it issued its final environmental impact statement on Aug. 26, 2011.

The only change to this final statement is the pipeline re-route through the state of Nebraska, which was approved by Gov. Dave Heineman last week. The re-route was thoroughly deliberated and adequately studied by Nebraska's Department of Environmental Quality. After extensive public comment, it issued a final report that cited minimal environmental impact and substantial economic benefit.

With Nebraska's final approval of the pipeline re-route on record, the application process that began about four-and-a-half years ago should have ended. All of the partnering states have signed off on the construction of the pipeline, and the final route has been determined to have minimal environmental impact. Pipeline approved.

Not so fast.

Although the president praised the merits of the southern route of Keystone and the need to encourage oil development and infrastructure domestically during a rally in Cushing, Okla., last spring, he has continued to stall its construction, along with the jobs, energy security and economic benefits the pipeline would create if the northern route were approved.

Pipelines have played a major role in our economy since 1905 when the first pipelines were constructed in Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas to transport oil to the East Coast. Since that time, the United States has accumulated more than 55,000 miles of crude oil pipelines that connect regional markets. These pipelines have provided safe, reliable and economical transportation of oil from supply centers to every area within the United States. Many of the cross-border pipelines have been approved within 18 to 24 months, but that has not been the case for the Keystone XL pipeline. For the past four years, it has been put on hold indefinitely.

There is nothing new to be approved in relation to the cross-border section that hasn't already been green-lighted in the State Department's final environmental impact statement. Any further review requested by the State Department would conflict with the memorandum of understanding between Nebraska and the State Department. Any requests for further studies or procedures on the pipeline would be redundant and only cause the process to move backward instead of forward. We cannot keep looking over the same reports and studies and expect a different conclusion.

The president said during his speech in Cushing, "We've got to make sure that we don't go backward, that we keep going forward. If we're going to end our dependence on foreign oil, if we're going to bring gas prices down once and for all, as opposed to just playing politics with it every single year, then what we're going to have to do is to develop every single source of energy that we've got." I couldn't agree more. Sometimes we get too caught up on the issues where we disagree and forget to focus on the projects on which we can agree. Keystone is such a project.

It is vital for the economy that we put politics aside and review the facts presented by scientists, experts and respected economists who agree that the Keystone XL pipeline will have minimal environmental impact and a substantial economic benefit to our country. Keystone must be approved immediately so we can continue to move forward and build a more robust future for America. The time has come for the United States to take control of its economic and energy destiny.

Rep. Lee Terry, a Nebraska Republican, serves on the Committee on Energy and Commerce.

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