

The Washington Times

House approves Keystone pipeline, setting up final Senate showdown

By [Stephen Dinan](#)
November 14, 2014

House lawmakers, in their first major vote since last week's elections, easily passed a bill to approve the Keystone XL pipeline that would bring crude oil from Canada to the U.S., sending the bill over to the Senate which will have a major showdown Tuesday.

Vote-counters say the pipeline's supporters are just about at the 60 votes needed to pass the Senate under the rules of debate set by Sen. Mary L. Landrieu, a Louisiana Democrat desperate to get the pipeline approved ahead of a Dec. 6 election runoff to save her Senate career.

The House, meanwhile, cleared the legislation easily, on a 252-161 vote, with one lawmaker voting present. In an election-year twist, the bill that passed was sponsored by Rep. Bill Cassidy, the Louisiana Republican who is seeking to unseat Ms. Landrieu in next month's runoff.

"Here we are on the ninth attempt. It has been 539 days, about a year and a half, since the House first sent a Keystone approval bill to the Senate in this Congress," Mr. Cassidy said Thursday in kicking off the House debate. "We are going to make it as easy as possible for the Senate to finally get a bill to the president's desk."

Mr. Cassidy's bill would grant TransCanada Corporation the right to build the Keystone XL pipeline, crossing the U.S.-Canada border and following the most recent route laid out in a permit application to Nebraska, where state regulators and courts are still hashing out final details.

Democrats who opposed the bill objected not only to the pipeline itself, but to the way Congress is going about approving it, short-circuiting a review pending before the Obama administration right now. Keystone backers say President Obama has politicized that review, drawing it out far longer than necessary even though his own State Department has concluded the pipeline would be safe and wouldn't add considerably to greenhouse gases.

Democrats questioned the studies showing building the pipeline would produce tens of thousands of jobs, and doubted whether the oil would reduce the price Americans pay at the pump for gasoline.

"The Keystone XL tar sands pipeline is a terrible deal for America," said Rep. Henry Waxman, ranking Democrat on the House Energy and Commerce Committee. "We get all the risks while the oil companies reap the rewards."

Those on both sides of the debate say the actual amount of oil from the pipeline would amount to a small fraction of the world supply, and if the U.S. doesn't allow a pipeline Canadian officials have signaled it would likely be routed to their west coast, where it could be shipped across the Pacific. The Cato Institute said the amount of oil that would flow through the pipeline would "add less than a hundredth of a degree to whatever the world's temperatures would be otherwise."

But the political significance of the vote dwarfs the greenhouse gas impacts.

Environmental groups have turned stopping the pipeline into their chief legislative priority, sparking a rift with some labor unions who see it as a source of good jobs and barometer of the country's economic health.

The fight even extends to the language both sides use to describe the source of the oil in the Western Canadian Sedimentary Basin in Alberta.

Opponents such as Mr. Waxman label it "tar sands," invoking the more sinister-sounding name that derives from the tar-like appearance of the sand, clay and bitumen that are being processed. Keystone backers like Mr. Cassidy, however, call it "oil sands," adopting the Alberta government's preferred term that highlights the usefulness of the end product after refinement.