

Keystone XL Pipeline bill falls one vote short of passage in Senate

November 18, 2014

A bill to approve the TransCanada Keystone XL pipeline project failed to pass the U.S. Senate by a single vote on November 18. The project currently transfers oil from sources in the Western Canadian Sedimentary Basin in Alberta, Canada to refineries in Illinois, Oklahoma, and Texas. Had it passed, the Northern Route Approval Act (H.R. 3) would have approved construction of a new section of pipeline from Hardisty, Alberta to Steele City, Nebraska, which would both shorten the pipeline route and allow shipments to include light crude oil from the Bakken formation of Montana and North Dakota.

Proponents of the bill argued that the project would contribute to economic gains and job growth and that heavy oil from Alberta will likely be used regardless of the pipeline approval. They also emphasized that alternate shipping methods, including rail, barge, or truck, are expensive, produce greenhouse gas emissions and are more prone to accidents and spills than a pipeline. Republican lawmakers have pledged to renew efforts to pass the bill when the new Congress convenes in January.

An environmental impact statement released earlier this year by the State Department found that the project would not have a significant impact on greenhouse gas emissions, since oil production in Alberta will likely continue whether the pipeline is built or not. However, critics of the bill argue that extracting crude from oil sands results in higher emissions than other extraction techniques and that construction of the project would set a precedent for opening unconventional resources to exploitation.

Sources: E&E News, Roll Call News
