

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Whitfield
Subcommittee on Energy and Power
Hearing on “H.R. 3, the Northern Route Approval Act”
April 10, 2013**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Today, we will be discussing H.R. 3, the “Northern Route Approval Act,” which would remove the federal delays that continue to block the Keystone XL pipeline expansion project. The Keystone XL pipeline has become a household name across the country. Unfortunately, this is far from the first hearing on the topic and far from the first bill designed to grant Keystone XL its long-overdue federal approval. But this project is too important to give up on, and we again offer legislation designed to green-light it.

The timeline of this project is a bit ironic. Our first legislative attempt to approve Keystone XL was criticized by some as unnecessary on the grounds that the Obama administration was already committed to making a final decision by the end of the year – and by year I mean 2011. As we all know, that did not happen.

Next, we were told that a dispute over a portion of the route through Nebraska needed to be addressed prior to any presidential decision. But early this year, the Governor of Nebraska notified the president that the intra-state issues have been resolved. And following the first Environmental Impact Statement released in August 2011, the latest Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement from the State Department that incorporates the Nebraska re-route, concludes that the project would have limited adverse environmental impacts.

At this point, we are led to believe that the administration has come up with a new excuse for further delays. But unfortunately we are unlikely to learn about it today since none of the federal agencies we asked to testify accepted our invitation. For the record, we asked the following agencies to attend: The U.S. Department of State, the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. However, we are pleased that an excellent group of non-governmental experts are with us today, and we look forward to hearing their perspectives.

Throughout all of the delays two things have not changed – the nation still faces unacceptable levels of unemployment as well as high gasoline prices. Keystone XL would help address both. Whether you are an unemployed welder or a low-income mom struggling to afford each fill-up at the pump, the delays are particularly unfair to the least fortunate among us. Little wonder the American people overwhelmingly favor this project- Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. America is a nation of builders, and the American people want to see Keystone XL built.

Yet, the approval process has dragged on for over four years and there is still no clear end in sight. And even if the president does eventually approve the pipeline, there is a real risk of litigation from environmental groups creating additional years of delays. The Northern Route Approval Act addresses all of these potential impediments and expeditiously approves the project.

I might add that this year marks the 40th anniversary of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline Authorization Act of 1973. Much like Keystone XL, the Alaska pipeline was held up for several years by federal red tape. It took an act of Congress to remove the roadblocks and finally approve the project. 40 years later, we now know that the Alaska pipeline has been a tremendous success, delivering over 16 billion barrels of oil to the American market while creating jobs and amassing an excellent environmental and safety record.

In retrospect, it seems ridiculous that the Alaska pipeline was nearly prevented from being built. And it is just as ridiculous that Keystone XL is taking this long. Once again, it is time for Congress to act.

By passing H.R. 3, we will soon see the 20,000 direct jobs and 100,000 indirect jobs, and then the million barrels per day of much-needed oil flowing from Canada to refineries in the Midwest and Gulf Coast.

I'd like to thank my friend Lee Terry of Nebraska for his leadership on this issue and for his sponsorship of H.R. 3. I hope that this bipartisan Keystone bill is the last one that will be necessary to start the project and that the next thing we hear about regarding the Keystone XL pipeline is the sound of thousands of workers building it.

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