

## POLITICS &amp; THE NATION

## Canada-to-U.S. pipeline plan set to clear a hurdle

AGENCY REVIEW TO FIND IMPACT 'LIMITED'

Route would increase flow from Alberta oil sands

BY JULIET EILPERIN

The State Department will remove a major roadblock to construction of a massive oil pipeline stretching from Canada to Texas when it releases its final environmental assessment of the project as soon as Friday, according to sources briefed on the process.

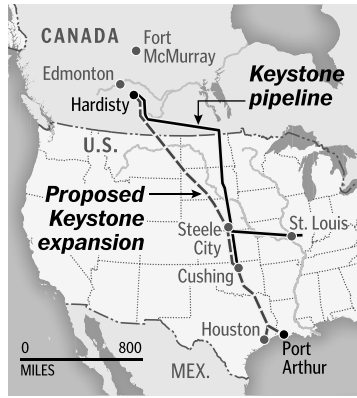
The move is critical because it will affirm the agency's earlier finding that the project will have "limited adverse environmental impacts" during construction and operation, according to sources familiar with the assessment who asked not to be identified because the decision has not been made public.

The department will have to conduct one more assessment — of whether the Keystone XL pipeline is in the "national interest" — before making a final permit decision by the end of the year.

The proposed TransCanada pipeline, which could transport as much as 500,000 barrels of crude oil a day from Canada's "tar sands" or "oil sands" fields in Alberta, has strained President Obama's relationship with his environmental base and become a proxy for the broader climate debate. Protesters from across the country have gathered daily in front of the White House since Saturday, resulting in 275 arrests so far.

Oil sands contain a viscous oil called bitumen in formations of sand, clay and water, and to extract it, companies expend more energy and water than they do to tap other crude deposits. Unlike conventional oil drilling, exploiting these resources is more like strip mining and requires tearing up large stretches of forests in northern Canada.

Canada's environmental ministry issued a report last month predicting that tar sands production will double in the next decade, causing greenhouse gas emissions from the country's oil and gas sector to increase by a third between 2005 and 2020.



LARISSA KARKLIS/THE WASHINGTON POST

"This is the primary test for Obama and the environment in the period between now and the election," said Bill McKibben, who co-founded the advocacy group 350.org and spent two nights in jail after being arrested Saturday at the protest. "This is his chance to do something on his own, without interference from Congress."

But the project's advocates — including United Association general president William Hite, whose union represents plumbers and pipefitters in North America — said it would employ thousands of Americans while supplying oil from a close ally. "It's a job engine for the country at a time when we need the jobs, and until we do something else, we need the oil," Hite said in an interview.

In an e-mail, State Department spokeswoman Wendy Nassmacher declined to comment on the Final Environmental Impact Statement beyond saying that it is "scheduled to be released later this month." But she noted the agency will hold a 90-day public comment period as it begins its "national interest" review of the permit application.

"The State Department is committed to a rigorous and transparent process, and we look forward to the public meetings," she wrote. "Although we expect to make a decision on whether to grant or deny the permit before the end of the year, we will not make a deci-



PHOTOS BY AMANDA VOISARD/THE WASHINGTON POST

Actress Margot Kidder was among the activists opposed to the pipeline who were arrested Tuesday at a sit-in in front of the White House.



Nidhi Tandon and Erich Vogt, right, of Toronto protested the pipeline plan from behind police barricades on Tuesday.

sion until we have completed this thorough review process."

Environmentalists have spent months pushing the State Department to conduct a more detailed study under the National Environmental Policy Act, which compels agencies to outline the potential impact of their decisions.

The Society for Conservation Biology has also questioned whether the administration has sufficiently scrutinized the fact

that the proposed pipeline and ones connected to it tracked the migration route for the endangered whooping crane.

"Unfortunately, there is no evidence that the State Department is living up to its promises, and it looks like this review will still fail to assess the critical health and safety issues that landowners and community members will be dealing with," Susan Casey-Lefkowitz of the Natural Resources Defense

Council wrote in an e-mail. "We have seen no evidence of a detailed alternative route study, a thorough environmental justice study nor an expert pipeline safety study."

State Department officials have spent the past few months responding to about 200,000 public comments and investigating issues including groundwater impact, pipeline safety, whether the project would spur additional tar sands extraction and whether oil shipped through it to the United States would ultimately be exported overseas. The results of this additional study did not change the department's earlier assessment, sources said.

Some states the pipeline will traverse may challenge aspects of the project. Casey-Lefkowitz pointed to the explosion that hit TransCanada's Bison natural gas pipeline in Wyoming last month, destroying a 60-foot section. Before the accident the company described the pipeline, which had been in operation for a year and a half, as "state of the art."

Alexander J. Pourbaix, TransCanada's president for energy and oil pipelines, defended his firm's safety record, saying that

TransCanada had built in an array of monitoring and shut-off measures that would minimize any accident's impact. "Keystone XL will be a very safe, and likely the safest oil pipeline built in the U.S.," Pourbaix said.

Without the pipeline, he said, the United States would become more dependent on oil-producing nations such as Nigeria, Venezuela and Libya. "The U.S. is going to remain dependent on crude oil for decades to come. The only question left to determine is where will that crude oil come from," he said. "Canada is a far better environmental steward than any of these other countries."

In a global market, analysts note, the heavy crude that will travel from Hardisty, Alberta, to Port Arthur, Tex., may very well end up being refined and shipped to Europe and Latin America to supply those regions' demand for diesel fuel. Three operators who have signed commitments to take oil from Keystone XL — Shell, Total and Valero — run refineries in Texas in Foreign Trade Zones exempt from custom duties, making them well-positioned to ship refined products overseas.

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## Russian spacecraft crashes in Siberia

Soyuz mission was a resupply flight to the space station

BY JIM HEINTZ AND MARCIA DUNN

CAPE CANAVERAL — A Russian supply ship to the international space station crashed in Siberia minutes after it was launched Wednesday, rattling NASA and others in this new era without any space shuttles to bail out the orbiting outpost.

The rocket failed barely a month after NASA's final shuttle flight.

Although the space station has more than enough supplies, the accident threatens to delay the launch of the next crew, one month away. That's because the upper stage of the unmanned Soyuz rocket that failed Wednesday is similar to the ones used to launch astronauts to the station.

Three of the six space station residents who are due to return to Earth in two weeks might end up staying longer. NASA wants a full staff to keep research going. The astronauts were just beginning to spend more time on scientific experiments, now that the station is complete.

The Soyuz rocket soared on time from Kazakhstan, and everything seemed to be going perfectly until about five minutes into the flight. The third stage ignited, but the rocket commanded the engine to shut down because of a problem, said NASA's space station program manager, Mike Suffredini.

All contact with the rocket was lost. Russian space officials declared it a total failure after receiving reports of wreckage falling with a deafening roar in a remote area of Siberia.

It was the first failure in the nearly 13-year life of the Kazakh

complex. There was no one-of-a-kind equipment aboard the destroyed Progress, Suffredini said. More than half the load was water, oxygen and fuel.

The shuttle Atlantis's final mission in July left the space station with a year's worth of provisions.

Without the shuttles, NASA is counting on Russia, Europe and Japan, as well as private U.S. businesses, to keep the station stocked. The Russians had three tons of supplies aboard the Progress ship that was destroyed. And the Russians will be transporting astronauts back and forth until U.S. private industry can pick up the human load.

NASA and its international partners want to keep the space

**Astronauts in the space station have enough supplies for now, according to NASA.**

station running until at least 2020.

American Ronald Garan Jr. and Russians Andrey Borisenko and Alexander Samokutyaev have been on the space station since April. They are due to return to Earth on Sept. 8.

Their Soyuz capsule for the ride home, which they were launched in, is docked to the space station and can remain safely in orbit for up to seven months. That's the length of the longest U.S. space mission to date.

Another Russian supply ship is due to launch in late October. A European freighter is scheduled to blast off with supplies in March, and a Japanese rocket in May. The space station easily could function until then, Suffredini said.

—Associated Press

## DIGEST

## ALABAMA

Obama aims to block immigration law

Lawyers for the Obama administration asked a federal judge Wednesday to temporarily block Alabama's immigration law, widely seen as the toughest state measure on illegal immigration in the country.

The law, set to take effect Sept. 1, requires police to detain anyone they suspect of being in the United States illegally if the person cannot produce proper documentation when stopped for any reason.

The law will also make it a crime to knowingly transport or harbor an illegal immigrant and requires public schools to determine, by reviewing birth certificates or sworn affidavits, the legal residency statuses of students upon enrollment.

The administration argues that the Constitution bars states from adopting immigration measures that conflict with federal laws. There are about 11 million illegal immigrants in the United States.

Georgia, Utah and Indiana are also defending new immigration

laws in federal court. The Obama administration successfully sued to block Arizona's law last year.

—Reuters

## NEW YORK

Weapons suspect's remarks suppressed

A judge has agreed to suppress statements that a man suspected of being an arms dealer made to U.S. investigators before he was transferred from Thailand to New York.

Federal Judge Shira Scheindlin ruled Wednesday that Viktor Bout's statements to investigators weren't made voluntarily.

Bout has been blamed for fueling deadly Third World conflicts with powerful weapons. He says

he is a legitimate businessman and has pleaded not guilty to conspiracy charges that carry a possible life term.

—Associated Press

## VIRGINIA

Officer can stay in Navy despite videos

The former commander of the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise can remain in the Navy, despite a finding that he committed misconduct in producing raunchy videos, a Navy panel ruled Wednesday.

The board of inquiry found that Capt. Owen P. Honors committed conduct unbecoming a naval officer, failure to demonstrate acceptable qualities of

leadership and substandard performance. The board did not elaborate on why Honors should remain in the Navy. The government had been asking that Honors be honorably discharged.

Honors helped produce and appeared in the videos that aired on the ship's closed-circuit television network between October 2005 and December 2007, when he was the ship's executive officer.

He said the videos were made to improve morale while teaching important shipboard lessons, such as water conservation. Among other things, the videos included simulated same-sex shower scenes, anti-gay slurs and references to prostitution in foreign ports.

—Associated Press

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