



Stranded as we are in a listless economy, you'd think both parties unanimously would support a project that could generate jobs and help fuel our nation. But that's just not so, and efforts are under way in Congress to end the unreasonable opposition to what could be a major benefit to our nation.

The proposed construction of the Keystone XL pipeline would play a huge role in our country's economic recovery. The Keystone XL project is a high-tech petroleum pipeline that would transport crude oil derived from the Athabasca Oil Sands in western Canada nearly 1,700 miles to processing facilities throughout the United States.

In addition to the estimated 20,000 short-term construction jobs it would create, it's been projected the project could generate 10 times as many permanent jobs in the long run. Besides the jobs created, the pipeline will provide easy access to affordable energy from our longtime ally to the north and generate billions of dollars in tax revenue.

The U.S. Department of State conducted an extensive environmental impact statement (EIS) on the project that was released in August. The EIS found that the pipeline project posed "no significant impacts to most resources" along its proposed path. Project leaders already have agreed to meet or exceed 57 safety standards set by the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration.

But despite the positive EIS findings, the agreement by project leaders to meet or exceed safety standards, the economic benefits and the fact that millions of Americans are looking for work, President Barack Obama has delayed the permit.

It's hard for me to imagine that Obama delayed this project for anything other than purely political reasons. I was disappointed that Obama was persuaded not by the project's benefits,

but rather by extreme environmentalist interest groups.

Already, the oil sands in western Canada have had a positive impact on Colorado's economy. Flatiron Construction, based in Colorado, recently opened an office in Fort McMurray, the town that services the Athabasca Oil Sands. The company receives almost 40 percent of its revenue from Canadian projects.

There's no reason we should neglect our reliable trade partner to the north. According to the Canadian government, 143,800 jobs in Colorado depend on U.S.-Canada trade, 10,866 people in Colorado are employed by 123 Canadian-owned companies and Colorado sells more goods to Canada than any other country in the world.

While the recent decision on the Keystone project has significant implications for our economy, it also has a very important impact on our national security. As a Marine Corps combat veteran, I believe it's imperative that we consider the security implications of our national energy policy. There's no doubt that the Keystone project would greatly help us reduce our dangerous dependency on sometimes-hostile foreign sources of energy.

Most American voters realize this and prefer that our country rely on Canada for oil instead of other foreign nations. A poll conducted last month by Harris Interactive for the American Petroleum Institute found that 79 percent of Americans feel that more U.S. imports of oil should come from Canada.

Also, of the world's top 15 exporters of oil, Canada is one of only two countries considered "free" by Freedom House, an international nongovernmental organization (NGO) that conducts research on political freedom and human rights.

Some estimates place the amount of potential oil in the Athabasca sands at 1.7 trillion barrels, which if accurate, would dwarf estimated reserves of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). More energy coming from Canada would lessen the precarious hold these foreign nations have on us with regard to energy.

Having traveled to the Middle East on four occasions courtesy of the U.S. Marine Corps, this is of particular importance to me. I was never sent to Canada to protect oil fields.

I recently signed on as a co-sponsor of House Resolution 3548, authored by U.S. Rep. Lee Terry, R-Neb., which would replace the president's authority to approve or disapprove the pipeline project and transfer it to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). I am hopeful the bill will allow us to expedite the permitting process, so pipeline construction can begin and immediately bring tens of thousands of new jobs.

It's time to take election-year politics out of the decision-making process for this issue.

If we don't act now, the Canadians will look somewhere else to sell their oil. The Chinese already have expressed serious interest in the oil, and Canadian politicians have stepped up their support for alternative infrastructure plans to redirect the oil to Asian markets.

We must move to permit the construction of the Keystone XL project. Otherwise, the Canadians will sell their oil to the Chinese, we'll be stuck relying on politically unstable nations for our oil and tens of thousands of immediate jobs will be lost.

If we're not going to develop our own resources to their full extent, then expanding energy trade with our friendly neighbor to the north clearly is the next-best option.

*By Rep. Mike Coffman*

*[The Denver Business Journal](#)*

*Published December 23, 2011*