

BERNARD SANDERS
VERMONT

COMMITTEES:
BUDGET, RANKING MEMBER
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND
PENSIONS
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4504

332 SENATE DIRKSEN OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
(202) 224-5141

1 CHURCH STREET, 3RD FLOOR
BURLINGTON, VT 05401
(802) 862-0697
1 (800) 339-9834

www.sanders.senate.gov

October 28, 2016

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

I write to respectfully but urgently request your intervention in the very troubling situation unfolding at and around the Standing Rock Sioux reservation in North Dakota. As you know, over the past day, scores of law enforcement officers dressed in riot gear and supported by military style vehicles forcibly removed hundreds of peaceful protesters who had gathered to oppose the Dakota Access Pipeline. There are disturbing reports of officers using sound cannons, pepper spray and rubber bullets. The authorities have already arrested at least 140 people.

The first priority must be protecting the safety of the peaceful protesters. That is why I urge you to direct the Department of Justice to send observers to protect the protestors' First Amendment rights to protest the pipeline. I also urge you to request that North Dakota Governor Jack Dalrymple remove the National Guard from the camp, as the military presence only threatens to inflame an already tense situation even more. Lastly, I urge you to direct the Army Corps of Engineers to stop construction within a mile between Highway 1806 and the Missouri River to help reduce tension.

The second priority is suspending all federal permits for this project until the Army Corps of Engineers completes a full cultural and environmental review. To my mind, the Corps should have never approved this project on an expedited basis in the first place. If completed, the pipeline will transport nearly 20 million gallons of crude oil every day, potentially threatening dozens of bodies of water, including Lake Oahe on the Missouri River. Since the Missouri River provides drinking water for 10 states and 28 tribes, a major spill from this pipeline could threaten the drinking water of millions of people. That is a risk we simply cannot afford to take.

The Dakota Access Pipeline would also be a huge blow to our fight against climate change. According to one report, burning the oil transported through the pipeline would produce carbon emissions equivalent to 21 million cars or 30 coal plants. If we have any hope of avoiding the worst consequences of climate change, we should not be building new oil pipelines that lock us into burning fossil fuels for generations to come. Rather, we should be building clean energy infrastructure to transform our energy system away from climate change causing fossil fuels and toward renewable sources of energy.

Moreover, it is deeply distressing to me that the federal government is putting the profits of the oil industry ahead of the treaty and sovereign rights of Native American communities. I understand the Standing Rock Sioux have sued to stop the pipeline, citing the very serious environmental concerns, encroachment on culturally sensitive lands, and violations of tribal treaty rights to a meaningful consultative role in the federal permitting process. To my mind, it is simply unacceptable to build a project like this, in one of the poorest counties in the nation, without the approval of the Native American residents who live there.

Mr. President, you took a bold and principled stand against the Keystone pipeline – I ask you to take a similar stand against the Dakota Access Pipeline. In the meantime, I urge you to take all appropriate measures to protect the safety of the Native Americans protesters and their supporters who have gathered peacefully to oppose the construction of the pipeline.

Sincerely,



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator