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Poll finds Keystone XL enjoys broad support in U.S.

By PAUL KORING

More than two thirds of those surveyed support pipeline

Despite renewed rallying efforts from environmentalists intended to stir broad opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline and extensive media coverage of several serious spills involving Alberta oil sands crude, Americans still solidly back the controversial project to funnel Canadian crude to Texas refineries, according to a new poll¹.

Even after president Barack Obama defined a new bar for approving Keystone XL -- that it not add significantly to carbon emissions driving global warming -- more than two-thirds of Americans (67 per cent) want the long-delayed project approved.

Public support is up slightly since January while opposition to TransCanada's \$5.3-billion pipeline from Alberta to sprawling refineries on the Gulf Coast remains stuck below one-quarter, at 24 per cent. While Republicans were more strongly in favour, the poll found a solid majority -- 56 per cent -- of Democrats also backed Keystone XL, suggesting that even among his base, Mr. Obama faces no serious threat if he gives the project a green light.

The president is expected to decide sometime later this year.

Opponents had vowed to create a new groundswell of opposition over the summer, with funding from billionaire turned climate-change activist Tom Steyer. But so far, despite scattered and persistent demonstrations dogging the president and a single large -- but below expectations -- rally in Washington, there's no evidence of a swing in public opinion away from broad backing of the project.

Still, as the National Journal, an influential publication read primarily by Washington insiders and Congressional staffers noted, those polled were told "that Keystone supporters "say it will ease America's dependence on Mideast oil and create jobs," while opponents "fear the environmental impact" of building the pipeline. Specific environmental impacts, such as emissions and the risk of spills, were not enumerated as part of the question."

That may have skewed results but a second question -- this one about Mr. Obama's plan to order tough new curbs on emissions from coal-fired generating plants -- suggests Americans remain deeply divided over whether conventional energy sources like oil and coal should be curbed to reduce greenhouse emissions that the president said seriously damage the planet.

In a landmark speech last month on the grave dangers posed by climate change, Mr. Obama said it was time "to put an end to the limitless dumping of carbon pollution from our power plants, and complete new pollution standards for both new and existing power plants."

It was the most sweeping and concrete proposal in a speech otherwise long on vague promises and short on

specifics. But taking on coal –still the biggest source of electricity generating – may prove far tougher the Keystone XL decision.

While the poll shows Keystone XL has majority support across the political divide, respondents were split on the broader issued of curbing emissions more along partisan lines.

While 60-per cent of Republican respondents want Congress to block Mr. Obama's threat to impose carbon emission curbs on coal plants, only 35-per cent of Democrats feel the same way.

Independents are almost evenly divided.

The National Journal's Congressional Connection Poll was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International, which surveyed 1,002 adults from July 11 to 14 via land line and cellular telephone. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.6 percentage points.

References

1. www.nationaljournal.com/congressional-connection/coverage/americans-support-the-keystone-xl-pipeline-by-wide-margin-20130716

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