

Federal study on Dakota Access pipeline to move forward

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A federal judge said Wednesday he won't keep the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers from launching a full environmental study of the \$3.8 billion Dakota Access pipeline's disputed crossing under a Missouri River reservoir in North Dakota.

U.S. District Judge James Boasberg denied Texas-based Energy Transfer Partners' request to stop the Corps from proceeding until he rules on whether the company already has the necessary permission to lay pipe under Lake Oahe, the water source for the Standing Rock Sioux tribe.

The Army published a notice Wednesday of its intent to prepare an environmental impact statement on the Lake Oahe crossing. ETP won't be able to lay pipe under the reservoir while the study is ongoing; it is currently blocked from doing so anyway.

A study could take up to two years, but the study notice can be withdrawn if Boasberg were to eventually rule that ETP has permission for the crossing, Army attorneys said. The notice says public comments will be accepted until Feb. 20 on "potential issues, concerns and reasonable alternatives" that should be considered in a study.

The stretch under Lake Oahe is the last big chunk of construction for the 1,200-mile pipeline. ETP has said in court documents there is already oil in a portion of the pipeline leading up to the lake in anticipation of finishing the project. But the Corps wants to look at alternate routes, the potential for a pipeline leak and tribal treaty rights in the wake of opposition by Standing Rock.

The Standing Rock Sioux and its supporters believe the four-state pipeline threatens drinking water and cultural

sites. The tribe issued a statement Wednesday saying the study is "yet another small victory on the path to justice."

ETP disputes the tribe's arguments and says the pipeline will be safe.

ETP said the Corps gave it permission in July to proceed with the Lake Oahe stretch, but the Corps says all of the necessary steps have not yet been completed — including an easement to work on federal land and the notification of Congress.

An environmental assessment conducted last year determined the crossing would not have a significant impact on the environment. However, Assistant Army Secretary for Civil Works Jo-Ellen Darcy said in December that a broader environmental impact statement was warranted.

The Standing Rock Sioux had urged people to lobby the Corps to start the study before President-elect Donald Trump takes office Friday. Trump, whose transition team said in a memo that he supports the pipeline's completion, could seek to reverse the Army's decision last month to not allow the river crossing.

North Dakota's U.S. senators, Democrat Heidi Heitkamp and Republican John Hoeven, said they think the federal government is changing the rules in the middle of the process and that the study shouldn't be approved.

Opponents have camped near the pipeline route in North Dakota since the summer. The number of arrests surpassed 600 this week, as 16 were arrested Monday and Tuesday in confrontations near the camp.

The North Dakota Supreme Court agreed Wednesday to allow lawyers who aren't licensed in North Dakota to handle protest cases on a temporary basis.

So long: Obama aims final messages at Trump

WASHINGTON (AP) — Barack Obama stepped behind the White House podium for the last time Wednesday, fielding questions from the crush of journalists crammed in for the occasion and offering assurances to Americans watching on TV.

But at times, his answers seemed aimed at an audience of one: The man who will replace him at noon on Friday.

Obama gently chided Donald Trump's suggestion that the U.S. might end its sanctions on Russia over Ukraine in exchange for nuclear stockpile reductions, saying it was in America's interest to make sure "we don't confuse why these sanctions have been imposed with a whole set of other issues."

And, with Trump vowing to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, a move that could further inflame tensions in the Middle East, Obama warned that when "sudden unilateral moves" are made in the region, the results can be explosive.

Obama also defended his decision to cut nearly three decades off convicted leaker Chelsea Manning's prison term, a move Trump's team has strongly criticized. Obama said the former Army intelligence analyst had served a "tough prison sentence" already.

With no elections left to win or legislative battles to fight, Obama used his parting words to deliver one set of messages to his successor, a man who is his opposite both temperamentally and politically. Obama said he expected a new president, particularly one from the opposing party, to "test old assumptions," but he also suggested it would be important for the next administration to "understand that there are going to be consequences, and actions typically create reactions."

The very fact that Obama was holding the afternoon news conference in the White House briefing room served as a symbolic counter to Trump. The president-elect's aides have raised the prospect of moving daily news briefings out of their traditional West Wing home, sparking fears of attempts to eventually push reporters out of the White House altogether.

Obama specifically addressed that worry: "Having you in this building has made this place work better," he declared.

"You're not supposed to be sycophants, you're supposed to be skeptics," Obama said to the reporters he has often criticized for hyping scandals and jumping from story to story too quickly.

"You're not supposed to be complimentary, but you're supposed to cast



AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais
President Barack Obama waves at the conclusion of his final presidential news conference, Wednesday, in the briefing room of the White House in Washington.

Obama daughters don't plan political careers

President Barack Obama says daughters do not intend to pursue a future in politics — thanks to the influence of his wife, Michelle.

But he says the girls "could not help but be patriotic" given the environment where they have grown up.

During Obama's eight years in office, the first lady became one of the most sought-after Democratic surrogates. But she detests politics and repeatedly has said she will never run for public office.

Obama says his daughters — 18-year-old Malia and 15-year-old Sasha — were disappointed in the outcome of the presidential election. Donald Trump defeated Democrat Hillary Clinton, who had been Obama's secretary of state.

He says he and his wife try to teach their daughters resilience. The president says, "They don't mope."

a critical eye on folks who hold enormous power and make sure that we are accountable to the people who sent us here."

Even the reporters the president called on seemed intended to send a pointed message to his successor. He kicked off the questioning with the president of the White House Correspondents' Association, which advocates for access on behalf of journalists. Reporters from Arab, Spanish-language, African-American, and gay and lesbian-focused publications followed.

In a sense, Obama was taking a page out of the playbook used by Trump advisers, who often try to communicate with their cable-news watching boss on the airwaves.

The president's press conference earned him prime real estate on the networks Trump keeps on his office television throughout the day, with most cable news outlets carrying the entire hour-long event live.

For years, Trump's only presence in Obama's orbit was as an irritant and the chief promoter of the lie that the president was born outside the United States. When Trump challenged for the presidency, Obama worked to stop him and seemed all but certain that Americans wouldn't back the Republican's brash and divisive politics.

Since Trump's unexpected victory, Obama has largely set aside that history and sought to help ease his successor's transition into office. He's spoken with Trump by phone numerous times, sometimes at length, he said Wednesday.

After eight years in office, the president suggested he's eager to step away from the political spotlight for a time. "I want to be quiet a little bit and not hear myself talk so darn much," he said Wednesday. But he also served notice that as an ex-president, he would speak out if Trump violates America's "core values."



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