

Oil in pipeline under Missouri River reservoir

The Associated Press

The Dakota Access pipeline developer said Monday that it has placed oil in the pipeline under a Missouri River reservoir in North Dakota and that it's preparing to put the pipeline into service.

Dallas-based Energy Transfer Partners made the

announcement in a brief court filing with the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. The announcement marks a significant development in the long battle over the project that will move North Dakota oil 2000 miles through South Dakota and Iowa to a shipping point in Illinois. The pipeline is three months behind schedule

due to large protests and the objections of two American Indian tribes who say it threatens their water supply and cultural sites.

ETP's filing did not say when the company expected the pipeline to be completely operating, and a spokeswoman did not immediately return an email seeking additional details.

"Oil has been placed in the Dakota Access Pipeline underneath Lake Oahe. Dakota Access is currently commissioning the full pipeline and is preparing to place the pipeline into service," the filing stated.

Despite the announcement, the battle isn't over. The Standing Rock and Cheyenne River Sioux tribes still have

an unresolved lawsuit that seeks to stop the project. The Standing Rock chairman did not immediately return a call seeking comment on ETP's announcement.

The tribes argue that a rupture in the section that crosses under Lake Oahe would threaten their water supply and sacred sites and would prevent them from

practicing their religion, which requires clean water.

The company disputes the tribes' claims and says the \$3.8 billion pipeline is safe.

The tribes in December held up the project by successfully pushing the U.S. government for a full environmental study of the Lake Oahe crossing, which is in southern North Dakota.

Trump creates office to bring business ideas to government

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is establishing a new White House office run by his son-in-law that will seek to overhaul government functions using ideas from the business sector.



Jared Kushner

Trump announced the White House Office of American Innovation in a memo Monday. "The office will focus on implementing policies and scaling proven private-sector models to spur job creation and innovation," he wrote.

The innovation office will be led by Jared Kushner, a senior adviser to Trump and daughter Ivanka Trump's husband, and will report directly to the president. White House spokesman Sean Spicer said early priorities for the office will be modernizing technology in the federal government and overhauling the Department of Veterans Affairs.

In the memo, Trump said the office will make recommendations to the president "on policies and plans that improve government operations and services, improve the quality of life for Americans now and in the future, and spur job creation."

Among those working on the effort are National Economic Council director Gary Cohn; Dina Powell, senior counselor to the president for economic initiatives

and deputy national security adviser; Chris Liddell, assistant to the president for strategic initiatives; and Reed Cordish, assistant to the president for intra-governmental and technology initiatives. All have extensive business experience.

Trump is announcing the new office at a low point in his young administration, days after the Republican bill to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, also known as "Obamacare," imploded in the House, revealing deep divides within the GOP and fraying tensions at the White House.

This effort has been developing since shortly after the inauguration, said a senior administration official, who requested anonymity to discuss details about the office. The group has been meeting since then and started talking to CEOs from various sectors about ways to make changes to federal programs. Areas its personnel hope to tackle include overhauling the Department of Veterans Affairs, improving workforce development and targeting opioid addiction.

Ivanka Trump, who has a West Wing office but no official job, will be involved with issues of interest to her, such as workforce development.

Visit to White House by intel chairman clouds investigation

WASHINGTON (AP) — House intelligence chairman Devin Nunes went to the White House grounds to review intelligence reports and meet the secret source behind his claim that communications involving associates of President Donald Trump were caught up in "incidental" surveillance, the Republican congressman said Monday.



AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais, File House Intelligence Committee Chairman Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Calif., speaks March 22 with reporters outside the White House in Washington following a meeting with President Donald Trump.

Nunes' revelation prompted the top Democrat on the committee, Rep. Adam Schiff, as well as the Democratic leaders in the House and Senate, to call on Nunes to recuse himself from the committee's Russia probe.

Schiff said Nunes' connections to the White House have raised insurmountable public doubts about whether the committee could credibly investigate the president's campaign associates.

"I believe the public cannot have the necessary confidence that matters involving the president's campaign or transition team can be objectively investigated or overseen by the chairman," Schiff said in a statement Monday.

Nunes confirmed Monday that he met with the source at the White House complex, but he denied coordinating with the president's aides.

After reviewing the information last week, Nunes called a news conference to announce that U.S. spy agencies may have inadvertently captured Trump and his associates in routine targeting of foreigners' communications. Trump quickly seized on the statements as at least partial vindication for his assertion that President Barack Obama tapped his phones at Trump Tower — though Nunes, Schiff and FBI Director James Comey have said there is no such evidence.

The Senate intelligence committee is also conducting

an investigation into Russia's interference in the election and possible ties with the Trump campaign. On Monday, it announced that Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, has agreed to be interviewed. The White House confirmed that Kushner, a senior Trump adviser, had volunteered to be interviewed about arranging meetings with the Russian ambassador and other officials.

Kushner is the fourth Trump associate to offer to be interviewed by the congressional committees looking into the murky Russia ties. Trump's former campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, Trump adviser Carter Page and Trump associate Roger Stone last week volunteered to speak as well.

"Mr. Kushner will certainly not be the last person the committee calls to give testimony, but we expect him to be able to provide answers to key questions that have arisen in our inquiry," the chairman, Sen. Richard Burr of North Carolina, and the top Democrat, Mark Warner of Virginia, said in a joint statement Monday in a sign of bipartisanship.

AP EXPLAINS

What is the Senate's 'nuclear option'?

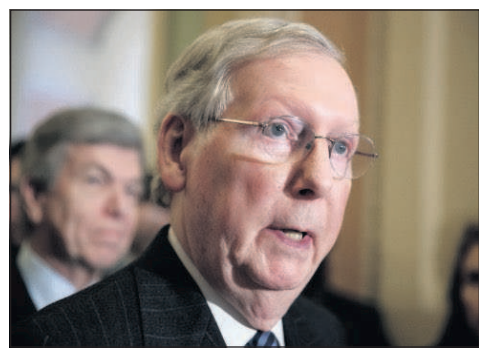
WASHINGTON (AP) — To blow up the rules or not? Senate Republicans and Democrats appear to be on collision course over President Donald Trump's nominee to the Supreme Court and whether to change Senate rules to get him confirmed.

Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., has announced that he will vote no on the nomination of Judge Neil Gorsuch and lead a filibuster of the selection. More than a dozen Democrats also have announced their opposition and will try to thwart GOP efforts to press ahead on the choice. Such a step would require 60 votes in the 100-seat Senate, but Republicans only hold a 52-48 majority.

The pressure is on Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., to change the parliamentary rules for Supreme Court nominees, lowering the threshold to a simple majority. Or, as Trump once put it, "go nuclear."

What is the nuclear option?

Under that option, nominations could be approved with a simple majority in the 100-member Senate. Now, it takes 60 votes to clear parliamentary hurdles and set up an up-or-down vote on the nominee.



AP file photos

Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer of N.Y. (left) and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky. (right) speak with reporters on Capitol Hill in Washington. Senate Republicans and Democrats appear to be on collision course over President Donald Trump's nominee to the Supreme Court and whether to change Senate rules to get him confirmed.

It's happened before

This procedural maneuver has recent precedent. In 2013, Democrats were in the majority under the leadership of Sen. Harry Reid of Nevada and upset about the blockage of President Barack Obama's nominees to a powerful appellate court. The Democrats pushed through a rules change lowering the vote threshold on all nominees except for the Supreme Court from 60 to a simple majority.

The Supreme Court was exempted at the time as part of a deal bringing along Democrats reluctant to change the rules.

At the time, McConnell warned Democrats the strategy would backfire: "I say to my friends on the other side of the aisle, you

will regret this, and you may regret it a lot sooner than you think."

Before 1975, it was even tougher for presidents to get their nominations through because two-thirds of the senators present and voting had to agree to move forward.

Why it would be explosive

Such a rules change on Supreme Court nominees would be a momentous change for the Senate, which traditionally operates via bipartisanship and consent from all senators. Some believe it could begin to unravel Senate traditions at a hyper-partisan moment in politics and perhaps end up in the complete elimination of the filibuster even for legislation, which would

mean an entirely different Senate from the one that's existed for decades.

Senate experts note that the filibuster is not enshrined in the Constitution and filibustering nominees is a relatively recent phenomenon. Cloture — the procedural motion to end a filibuster — was attempted for the first time on a nominee in 1968 after President Lyndon Johnson tapped Abe Fortas as chief justice of the U.S., according to the Congressional Research Service.

The cloture attempt failed and the nomination was withdrawn.

McConnell is an institutionalist who has made clear he does not favor invoking the nuclear option, but he has not ruled it out for Gorsuch.

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