

“Dollarocracy”: Coverup of “Anomalies” and Environmental Impacts of TransCanada Keystone XL Southern Half

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What's the U.S. congressional response to the safety issues with the 485-mile southern half of [TransCanada's](#) Keystone XL pipeline [raised by Public Citizen's](#) Texas office? Mostly what [Simon & Garfunkel](#) called “[The Sound of Silence](#)” in their famous song.

DeSmogBlog contacted more than three dozen members of the U.S. Congress representing both political parties to get their take on [Public Citizen's alarming findings in its November investigation](#) (including dents, metal that had to be patched up and pipeline segments labeled “junk”), but got little in the way of substantive responses.

 [Set to open for business on January 22, approved via an Executive Order by President Barack Obama in March 2012](#) and rebranded the “[Gulf Coast Pipeline Project](#)” by TransCanada, the southern half of the pipeline has garnered far less media coverage than its U.S.-Canada border-crossing brother to the north, [Keystone XL's](#) northern half.

[Over two dozen members](#) of the U.S. House of Representatives [wrote a letter to President Obama on December 12](#) expressing concern over the [conflicts-of-interest in the U.S. State Department's environmental review process](#) for the northern half of the line.

But none of them would comment on concerns with the southern half of the line raised in the Public Citizen report after multiple queries via e-mail from *DeSmogBlog*.

Two to Tango



Only two out the dozens contacted offered somewhat substantive comments.


And one of them, U.S. Rep. Ralph Hall (R-TX) (Left), did not respond to the meat and bones of the question at hand. He did offer some oft-used industry talking points, though.

“The Keystone pipeline will create jobs and help reduce dependence on oil supplies from unfriendly nations,” Hall told *DeSmogBlog*. “The State of Texas has a proven track record of successful oversight of the oil and gas industry, including pipelines, and I am confident that they will be diligent in ensuring the pipeline’s safety.”

Hall — who took [\\$59,500](#) from the oil and gas industry before the 2012 elections and has already

taken [\\$12,500](#) for the upcoming 2014 elections — is far from a neutral stakeholder in the debate over anything pertaining to the petroleum industry.

“Since 2010, Hall has earned as much as \$1 million from a company that holds mineral rights along the Barnett Shale,” [explained a March 2013 Sunlight Foundation article](#). “The money was disclosed as dividends from a company called North & East Trading Co. (N&E).”


On the other side of the aisle, U.S. Rep. Gene Green (D-TX) (Right) also responded to *DeSmogBlog*’s request for comment, offering more cautious words of support for the  southern half of the pipeline’s commencement.

“Over the past decades, our interstate and intrastate pipeline systems have had remarkable safety records, unmatched by rail or highway modes of transportation,” Green stated.

“To address the anomalies cited by the Public Citizen report, the operator, in agreement with PHMSA, has placed special conditions for evaluating and addressing the alleged issues. I have confidence that our federal agencies will effectively oversee projects under their jurisdiction and ensure that the Agency’s record of safety continues throughout the entirety of the project.”

Green received [\\$96,700](#) from the oil and gas industry before the 2012 elections and has taken another [\\$31,100](#) from these industries in the run-up to the 2014 elections.

“Isn’t Really That Interested In It”

Others offered even less in the way of comments. Asked if U.S. Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA) had any response to Public Citizen’s findings, [Press Secretary Bill Silverfarb — formerly a reporter for the San Mateo Daily Journal](#) — simply said, “No.” 

U.S. Rep. [John Culberson’s \(R-TX\) communications director Stephen Worley](#) told *DeSmogBlog*, “I’m going to have to pass. Thanks though,” in response to the query. Culberson took [\\$99,850](#) from the oil and gas industry before the 2012 election and has taken another [\\$39,500](#) from the industry in the months leading up to the 2014 elections.

And a staffer from U.S. Rep. Alan Grayson’s (D-FL) (Right) office told *DeSmogBlog* his “boss isn’t really that interested in it” in response to being shown Public Citizen’s findings.

“Dollarocracy”

So what does Public Citizen have to say when asked about the Congressional response — or lack thereof — to its findings in its November report?

“Our report documented 125 excavations dug by TransCanada because of possible problems with welds, dents, unsupported pipe and other issues that could cause leaks and spills,” said Tom Smith, director of Public Citizen’s Texas office. “So far, we have no information from either the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) or TransCanada about those excavations.”

“We do not know if there have been repairs or if those repairs have been inspected. Between our report and PHMSA’s own documentation in warning letters to

TransCanada, there is evidence of hundreds of problems that could lead to leaks or spills in a pipeline that crosses 631 Texas streams and rivers and comes within miles of towns and cities.”

With just about a month to go until it opens for business, Smith says Congress needs to launch an investigation, which looks unlikely given the responses of congressional members.

“This is unacceptable and demonstrates why Congress needs to step in and review whether PHMSA is protecting the pipeline or the people,” said Smith.

“Unacceptable” is one way of putting it. And another is what John Nichols and Bob McChesney called “[Dollarocracy](#)” in describing the U.S. political system in their recent book, an apt description of the state of play for the soon-to-be-open southern half of the Keystone XL pipeline.

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