

Trump Team Has Ties to Atlantic Coast Pipeline Now Being Pushed by White House

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On January 25, President Donald Trump's team [listed the Atlantic Coast pipeline](#) among the White House's top priorities for infrastructure projects, an attempt to deliver on his campaign promise to invest in U.S infrastructure programs.

Of the 50 on the list, [Atlantic Coast](#) is surprisingly the only pipeline project named. Some had suspected Trump's infrastructure promise would serve as a massive pipeline giveaway. So, why prioritize this one?

A possible answer: Several members of Trump's transition team, landing team, and current White House operation have connections to companies behind the project or to firms lobbying for it.

The Atlantic Coast pipeline has been [proposed](#) by a partnership among Dominion Resources, [Duke Energy](#), and Southern Gas Company.

The natural gas pipeline, currently under review by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), has faced staunch opposition from environmental activists and residents along its [550-mile-long path](#) stretching from West Virginia through Virginia to North Carolina. It will carry natural gas obtained via [hydraulic fracturing \("fracking"\)](#).

Among other things, detractors [argue](#) that the pipeline will have adverse effects on sensitive habitats, reduce property values, and introduce dangerous precedents for the seizure of private property through eminent domain.

The pipeline is included in a [document](#) listing the Trump White House's highest priority infrastructure projects. The document, which was [leaked recently to the Kansas City Star](#), had reportedly been sent by Trump transition team members to the National Governor's Association for review and comment.

Titled, "[Priority List: Energy and National Security Projects](#)," the list includes various highway and rail expansions, airport upgrades, hydro and wind power projects, new transmission lines, and a sole natural gas pipeline: the Atlantic Coast.



Among Trump's 50 top priority infrastructure projects, Atlantic Coast was the only pipeline that made the cut.

"The projects are among a total investment of \$137.5 billion described in the document,"

reported the Star. “Half that amount is supposed to represent private investment. The document does not specify how any of the projects, including KCI [Kansas City Airport], would be funded, how the federal government prioritized these projects or any timeline for completion.”

Trump also recently [signed an executive order](#) calling for expedited permitting and construction of all pipeline projects.

Trump Beneficiaries

DeSmog research has revealed that a few Trump associates could benefit financially if this prioritized pipeline opens for business.

One is Dan DiMicco, who served as a Senior Economic Adviser to Trump’s campaign and led the new administration’s U.S. Trade Representative transition team. He also [sits](#) on the Board of Directors of Duke Energy, one of the pipeline project co-owners.

DiMicco, the former CEO of steel giant Nucor, [met](#) with Trump in Trump Tower in mid-December, when he was considering DiMicco for the position of U.S. Trade Representative. Eventually, former Deputy U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer [got](#) the job.

Another tie can be seen between Trump presidential [campaign adviser](#), U.S. Rep. Richard Hudson (R-NC), and his former chief-of-staff Pepper Natonski. Since at least January 2016, Natonski has [been lobbying on behalf of Duke](#) and its stake in “natural gas utilities regarding pipeline safety legislation and any regulatory regime affecting natural gas utilities” and serves as Director of Federal Affairs for the company, [according to Politico Influence](#).

In its [Resource Report](#) submitted to FERC, Atlantic Coast pipeline [lists Natonski](#) among the stakeholders it contacted to educate about the project. The company says it met with Hudson or his staff on five different instances and also had seven different pipeline-centric email interactions. Today, this [rising influencer among D.C. political circles](#) is lobbying Congress on behalf of one of the project’s owners.



Image Credit: U.S. Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

Yet another connection between the Atlantic Coast project and the Trump White House is Rosario Palmieri, who [lobbies](#) on behalf of the pipeline for the National Association of Manufacturers. He formerly [worked as a staffer](#) for Vice President Mike Pence when he served in the House of Representatives.

“Very Encouraged”

Dominion appears excited to have been included on the list of Trump’s top infrastructure projects.

“We’re very encouraged by the Trump administration’s strong commitment to rebuilding the nation’s energy infrastructure,” Aaron Ruby, a spokesperson for Dominion Resources, [said of his company’s inclusion](#) on the list for Atlantic Coast. “This administration has taken some important first steps to clear the path for critically important projects, and we’re eager to

work with the president to ensure that projects like the Atlantic Coast Pipeline are approved and built in a timely manner.”

On the list of priority infrastructure projects, the Trump team claims Atlantic Coast could create 10,000 jobs. By way of comparison, Keystone XL — which is about twice the length as Atlantic Coast — will create 2,500–4,650 construction jobs, according to a [report](#) published by Cornell University’s Global Labor Institute. As the Kansas City Star pointed out, there is little information to back up the claims made in the leaked document at this point.

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