

# Heitkamp welcomes Alberta's premier, talks Keystone XL

By [Bryan Horwath](#) on Nov 16, 2013 at 3:18pm

WASHINGTON — Continuing a push from North Dakota's political delegation for approval of the Keystone XL pipeline, Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, D-N.D., welcomed Alberta's premier to Washington this week in an effort to bolster U.S.-Canadian energy relations.

Stemming from an invitation offered by North Dakota's junior senator during a visit to the Alberta oil sands in August, Premier Alison Redford met with Heitkamp, Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., and other leaders before taking questions from reporters on Tuesday.

Heitkamp said the goal of her invitation was to continue to discuss how Canada and the U.S. can work together to improve North American energy security and independence, including gaining State Department approval for the controversial pipeline that would slice through America's heartland, bringing oil from Canada and the Bakken to south Texas.

"We want to heighten the importance of the (Keystone XL) for American interests, not just Canadian interests," Heitkamp said during a phone interview Friday. "We want to also talk about this great trading partnership that we've had historically with Canada, which we want to maintain. If we're going to look at using foreign oil, we'd much rather see that foreign oil come from Canada than from Venezuela or Iran."

Heitkamp said part of Redford's visit also served to make the premier available to answer questions about the much-maligned pipeline, which needs the green light from President Barack Obama before it can be completed.

During a teleconference on Tuesday, Redford answered some of those questions.

"We are privileged to have the oil sands in our province and we are continuing to come to Washington to talk about the work that we've done over the last number of years on our environmental record," Redford said. "We're very proud in Alberta to have a strong record with regard to the oil sands and environmental sustainability.

"Every opportunity that I have to talk about that, particularly right now in Washington as people are considering the presidential permit on Keystone, is very helpful for us."

Environmentalists, including the Sierra Club, which has a North Dakota chapter, and others, have long decried the mass opening of the Alberta oil sands, calling their stance a key battle in the fight against perceived climate change. Conversely, Heitkamp, Landrieu and Sen. John Hoeven, R-N.D., have been mainstays as champions of the Keystone XL in the Senate.

"We care an awful lot about where we live in Alberta," Redford said. "We've invested heavily in carbon capture and storage, to the tune of \$1.3 billion, we have an integrated land use plan that monitors air, water and land, and we'll continue to allow for development of our resources in a sustainable manner. We think that Keystone (XL) matters an awful lot to our economy and we know from discussions with other leaders in the U.S. that it matters a lot to a lot of local economies."

During the conference call, Landrieu referred to Canada, the U.S. and Mexico as a "neighborhood" and said the Keystone XL is an important part of the energy security puzzle for the area.

As for whether the pipeline will ever actually gain approval, Heitkamp said she remains optimistic.

“I still believe the pipeline will get approved,” Heitkamp said. “Maybe that’s because I look at it from the standpoint of what the legal rationale is for denying the permit. The permit process is there — it can’t be arbitrary. As far as I’m concerned, there is no legal rationale for denying the permit for the Keystone XL. I think that’s what the State Department will ultimately say.”

Continuing a recent trend of several railway explosions involving trains transporting oil in North America — the most recent coming in Alabama earlier this month — Heitkamp said more talk has shed light on safety pitfalls related to railcar oil transport.

“I’m tired of going to hostile neighborhoods around this world to get energy,” Landrieu said during the conference call. “We have friendly neighbors around us that can help us be the energy capital of the planet. It just doesn’t make any sense.”