

ENERGY MATTERS

Poll Finds Illinoisans Support Energy Industry And DAPL Optimization

by Craig Stevens

(NAPS)—On March 5th and 6th the Illinois Commerce Commission will gather to consider the proposed Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) Optimization plan to increase crude oil through-



Craig Stevens

put of the pipeline. Safely operating since 2017, Dakota Access has an important footprint in Illinois. Construction of the initial pipeline relied on the skill of Illinois' labor unions and plans for the optimization also include the use of skilled labor.

With Illinois playing host to the Patoka Oil Terminal, the second-largest pipeline terminal in the Midwest, the state serves as a center point to the region's energy security and needs. Importantly, Dakota Access Optimization is the type of energy project that has the broad support of Illinoisans across the state.

A recent statewide poll found nearly two-thirds of Illinois residents support optimization of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Nearly 85 percent of residents recognize the important role it plays in contributing millions of dollars in state and local taxes to help fund schools, social services, and other emergency services. The vast majority of residents, 84 percent, believe the pipeline is a safer means of transportation of energy resources compared to the alternatives of truck and rail.

The poll also found broad, bipartisan support for the energy industry across the state. In fact, nearly 9 out of 10 respondents believe the industry plays an important role in the state's economy. Furthermore, 92 percent of Illinoisans reported it was important the United States produce all of its own energy and become more energy independent. The energy industry already plays an important role in the state with Illinois employing more than 110,000 workers in the energy industry and projects like Dakota Access Optimization can help do more.

If approved, Dakota Access Optimization would install a new pump station along the pipeline's route in Illinois, without any new mainline con-

struction or added mileage. Pump station construction and operation are built to comply with the same state and federal regulations guiding pipeline infrastructure.

The need for the optimization of the Dakota Access Pipeline was born out of strong and sustained oil production in the Bakken region of North Dakota. With the Dakota Access Pipeline responsible for transporting as much as 40% of daily Bakken production, and production reaching 1.46 million barrels per day in November of 2019

Illinois' role in the country's energy security has never been more important with the Patoka Oil Terminal servicing five major crude oil pipelines in the region through its 19 million barrel storage capacity. Outbound crude oil is delivered by pipeline to a number of refineries across the Midwest including Ohio, Kentucky, Illinois, and Indiana. The processing capacity of the Patoka Oil Terminal is an integral part of the U.S. energy mix; however, short-sighted opponents continue to fight the proposed project.

Unfortunately, many of those opposed form some of the same groups that fueled the months-long Dakota Access Pipeline protests in 2016 and 2017 – protests that left taxpayers on the hook for nearly \$40 million in damages. These same opponents have encouraged followers to upend public hearings and pester policymakers without the facts in hand. In light of the recent poll showing broad support for the Dakota Access Pipeline and the state's energy industry, it is clear these opponents are in the vocal minority.

Record production in the Bakken and key infrastructure such as the Dakota Access Pipeline have been leaders in the country's remarkable energy resurgence. Optimizing the Dakota Access Pipeline seizes the moment to add critical capacity to an important energy lifeline. Most importantly, the proposed project prioritizes safety and efficiency while supporting jobs, bolstering the nation's energy security, and promoting new economic opportunities for Illinois.

Stevens is a former senior advisor to U.S. Energy Secretary Sam Bodman and the spokesman for Grow America's Infrastructure Now (GAIN).