

Feb 7, 2021 - Politics & Policy

Top union leader: Biden's Keystone plan wrong, will cost U.S. jobs



Jonathan Swan



AXIOS on HBO: AFL-CIO President Trumka on the Keystone XL...



AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka told Jonathan Swan in an interview for "Axios on HBO" that he wished President Biden hadn't canceled the [Skip to main content](#)

Why this matters: Organized labor is crucial to the Biden coalition. But there are significant tensions among environmentalists, the president's team addressing climate change and some parts of the labor movement.

- The Laborers' International Union of North America said the Keystone decision will cost 1,000 existing union jobs and 10,000 projected construction jobs.
- "The Laborers' International was right," said Trumka.

Between the lines: Trumka said he thought Biden had learned a lesson from his Keystone announcement and that he hopes the president will pair any future decisions that would kill union jobs with simultaneous and specific announcements about how those jobs would be replaced.

- "If you destroy 100 jobs in Greene County, Pennsylvania, where I grew up, and you create 100 jobs in California, it doesn't do those 100 families much good," Trumka said.
- "If you're looking at a pipeline and you're saying we're going to put it down, now what are you going to do to create the same good-paying jobs in that area?"
- Trumka also appeared to be uneasy — pausing for a few seconds and ducking the question — when asked whether he was comfortable with Biden's plan to ban fracking on federal lands.
- White House spokesman Vedant Patel said, "President Biden has proposed transformative investments in infrastructure that will not

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The bottom line: Trumka, who started his career as a coal miner, signaled he will have no patience for promises of retraining programs as consolation for union workers forced from their jobs.

- "You know, when they laid off at the mines back in Pennsylvania, they told us they were going to train us to be computer programmers."
- "And I said, 'Where are the computer programmer jobs at?' 'Uh, they're in, uh, Oklahoma and they're in Vegas and they're here.' And I said, 'So, in other words, what we're going to be is unemployed miners and unemployed computer programmers as well.'"

People "love where they live and they love the people in that area," Trumka said. "And to them, that's home. And that's their culture."

- "I think what doesn't get understood quite enough in the country, particularly in D.C. politics, is that that culture is very, very important to the people who live there."

Editor's note: Updates with White House comment.



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AFL-CIO leader: Clinton, Obama let down unions



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AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka. Photo: "Axios on HBO"

AFL-CIO boss Richard Trumka told Jonathan Swan in an interview for "Axios on HBO" that former Presidents Clinton and Obama didn't understand unions' importance — and were disappointments to organized labor because of it.

What they're saying: "Joe Biden has surrounded himself with people that are worker-friendly, so that in the multitude of decisions that are made every day without the president being involved, they're going to think about the impact it has on workers," Trumka said.

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Trumka defends police unions on racial justice sincerity



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Police unions "should be able to negotiate disciplinary stuff" to protect officers from unfair punishment, AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka said during an "Axios on HBO" interview.

Why this matters: Following last year's death of George Floyd during an arrest and the subsequent Black Lives Matter protests nationwide, law enforcement unions are at the center of a heated debate in the labor movement.

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Axios
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“Axios on HBO” exclusive: Top labor leader hits Democrats

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Coming up on "Axios on HBO" at 6 p.m. ET/PT: AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka criticizes Joe Biden for costing American jobs with his Keystone pipeline decision and former Presidents Obama and Clinton for slighting unions.

- Also on the show: Ex-Parler CEO John Matze and Transportation Sec. Pete Buttigieg.
- Catch the full interview and much more on Sunday, February 7 at 6 p.m. ET/PT on all HBO platforms.



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