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PIPELINES

Trumka hits Biden over lost Keystone XL jobs

Lesley Clark and Carlos Anchondo, E&E News reporters • Published: Monday, February 8, 2021



AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, pictured here at a Sept. 24, 2019, rally, told *Axios*' Jonathan Swan that he wishes President Biden had not revoked a key permit for the Keystone XL oil pipeline on his first day in office. Francis Chung/E&E News

Richard Trumka, the president of the AFL-CIO, in an interview that aired last night criticized President Biden for announcing on his first day that he'd scrap a key permit for the Keystone XL pipeline.

Trumka, in a wide-ranging interview with *Axios* on HBO, said Biden should not have pulled Keystone XL's cross-border permit on his first day and said the Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA) was right that the decision will leave many union members out of work.

"It did and will cost us jobs in the process," Trumka **told** *Axios*' Jonathan Swan. "I wish he had paired that more carefully with the thing that he did second by saying, 'Here's where we're creating jobs.' We can do mine reclamation, we can fix leaks and we can fix seeps and create hundreds of thousands of jobs in doing all of that stuff."

Trumka compared Biden favorably to former Presidents Clinton and Obama, saying, "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 he believes Biden realizes the Keystone XL announcement was a mistake, but also said he has not spoken with Biden about it.

"And if I had, I wouldn't tell you," Trumka said.

Biden rejoined the Paris climate accord and rescinded federal approval for Keystone XL within hours of taking office Jan. 20, pledging that his administration would tackle climate change and provide millions of new jobs in green energy. Keystone XL sought to move crude oil from Alberta through Montana, South Dakota and Nebraska.

A White House spokesperson responded to Trumka yesterday, reiterating Biden's promise that the transition from fossil fuels to renewable sources will create jobs as well as reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

"President Biden has proposed transformative investments in infrastructure that will not only create millions of good union jobs but also help tackle the climate crisis," said assistant press secretary Vedant Patel.

Trumka, who said he believes Biden understands "the importance of labor," added that although he doesn't know whether Biden will cancel additional pipelines — developer TC Energy Corp. said Jan. 20 that "advancement of the project will be suspended" — if he does, Biden will pair it with job creation that will be greater than the number of jobs lost.

Terry O'Sullivan, general president of LIUNA, slammed Biden's Keystone XL decision last month, while expressing support for the president's "Build Back Better" campaign.

"But for union members affected by this decision, there are no renewable energy jobs that come even close to replacing the wages and benefits the Keystone XL project would have provided," O'Sullivan said in a statement Jan. 20. "Killing good union jobs on day one with nothing to replace them, is not building back better."

Biden on the campaign trail and in office has portrayed his plan to tackle climate change, which includes rejoining the Paris Agreement and halting new oil and gas leasing on public lands and waters, as a way of creating new jobs in a green energy economy.

But Republicans have sought to cast that agenda as a threat to jobs and American workers.

Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas), who was among 26 Senate Republicans who last month asked for a personal meeting with Biden to discuss his recent climate executive actions, was among the Republicans last night tweeting a link to the Trumka interview ([Greenwire](#), Jan. 29).

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