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## McKibben capitalizes on pipeline rejection

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RIPTON — Bill McKibben had reason to celebrate last week after President Obama rejected a proposed massive pipeline that would have shipped oil from Canada to Texas. He was a prominent force in opposition to the Keystone XL Pipeline.

But the Ripton-based environmental activist isn't taking a rest. McKibben and 500 protesters plan to march on Capital Hill Tuesday adorned in referee outfits.

"We're going to bring out the links between big oil money and the way decisions are made ... blowing a whistle on big oil and its interference in our political system," said McKibben, who is a Middlebury College Scholar and co-founder with Middlebury students of the anti-climate change group 350.org.

The demonstrators hope to take advantage of the momentum created by Obama's denial of the Keystone XL permit.

"This is one of the very few days when scientists got to smile and big oil had to scowl," McKibben said. "You can tell by the howls of outrage from the fossil fuel industry that they aren't used to losing."

McKibben said the victory proved that average people can still make a difference against big business.

"All the conventional wisdom and the fossil fuel industry were against us, yet people were able to make their voices heard and prevail," he said.

"Left to its own devices, money is usually going to triumph. But if people are willing to put their bodies on the line and engage in all kinds of hard work, then good things can happen."

In addition to 350.org, the activist group Tar Sand Action helped organize people to fight the Keystone XL Pipeline. In the two weeks leading up to Labor Day, 1,253 demonstrators — many who were Vermonters — were arrested in front of the White House during a two-week protest in late August. McKibben and Middlebury College Visiting Lecturer Christopher Shaw were arrested Aug. 20 and spent nearly 60 hours in prison.

"For a couple of weeks, we found a different currency in which to work, and that was our bodies," he said at the time.

Then in November, in what McKibben called the largest act of civil disobedience in the last 30 years, an estimated 12,000 people encircled the White House to further protest the 1,700-mile pipeline.

The media attention garnered by the protests played a vital role in the President's decision, said Christopher Klyza, professor of public policy, political science and environmental studies at Middlebury College.

"Climate change has not been getting a lot of media attention lately, but the protests made this pipeline permit a big deal for Obama," he said. "People have to talk about it like they haven't had to before, and that's really big."

But not everyone hailed the pipeline's rejection as a victory.

"It's really disappointing," said Matt Cota, executive director of the Vermont Fuel Dealers Association, a nonprofit trade association that represents nearly 300 distributors of fuel and related services.

"This oil will be burned, the question is whether it will be to the economic benefit of other countries or our country," he said. "If you put (the oil) on a container ship and move it across the ocean where it will be burned rather than efficiently moving it through a pipeline where it can be used domestically ... it doesn't make much sense."

"The idea that by not building a pipeline you are somehow keeping that oil in the ground is incredibly naive."

While Klyza called the pipeline rejection a "clear victory" for environmentalists, he cautioned that the greater impact is still unknown.

"Five years down the road we might not even remember this if there is some other pipeline built," Klyza said. "The key is that by not building it now, it gives environmental activists time to create other political outcomes. The victory is really leaving the window open longer."

McKibben said the pipeline rejection must be a springboard to enact more lasting changes.

"There are no permanent victories in the environmental world," he said. "Hopefully, this has given us enough time to show people that global warming is such a serious problem that this oil needs to stay in the ground."

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