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# Pipeline Controversy in the News

By Danielle Betterman

LEHIGH UNIVERSITY

## Introduction

In 1962, Rachel Carson introduced to the general public the possible side effects of human pollution on the earth (Cushman 2014). Her well-researched book, "Silent Spring," proved to have a large impact on the environmental movement and possibly influenced multiple environmental policy decisions. Since this time of environmental awareness, media coverage of environmental issues has become routine.

Recently, a major environmental controversy involves expansions of natural gas pipelines in the United States and Canada. The Keystone XL Pipeline, which was proposed to run from Canada through the Midwest and end in Texas, stirred up many opinions among those possibly affected by the new infrastructure and the rest of the country.

The media got involved in the action by covering the progress of the proposal while it attempted to gain approval from the United States national government, and even revealed some unknown facts to their readers through investigative reporting. During the approval process, Postmedia News gained access to "secret" documents through Canada's access-to-information law, which stated that Canada, as well as the United States, were already experiencing the effects of climate change, concluding that any added infrastructure could worsen the conditions (Cushman 2014).

Local and national news outlets both covered the Keystone Pipeline, and although other pipeline expansions might not be making national news, many local pipeline proposals are being followed by local news media. Members of the general public who only stay informed through the national news sources may overlook local coverage. Environmental change could be happening in their local area and affecting them without their knowledge.

## Media's Effect on the Public Opinion

How the media covers the many issues surrounding natural gas pipelines has the potential to affect how readers view the controversy. Negative or positive headlines, an obvious bias in the article, an imbalance of sources, among other things, can skew the thoughts and opinions of the readers. Of course, different media outlets cover the same topics in a variety of ways. If one were to look at three different newspapers in one area, he or she would realize that the writers focus on different aspects and sometimes seem to lean on one side of the argument depending on the sources or the language the writer uses.

Most of the pipelines that have been prominently covered by news media, including the Keystone XL, the Atlantic Sunrise, and the PennEast, are now under greater scrutiny because their builders want to extend their lengths.

After the media first announced the expansions, the newspapers reported on a range of different effects that the pipelines were having. These included political, environmental, economic and personal implications. As the proposals now go through the state and national governments, the politics of the issue have taken the forefront during the

election seasons. The media has also heavily covered the potentially harmful environmental impact and negative effect on home values.

The Keystone pipeline was proposed to expand across multiple Midwestern states, starting in Alberta, Canada, going through Montana, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma and ending in Texas. Because the Keystone pipeline crosses more land in the United States, it gained much more national coverage than the other pipelines. It fell under the jurisdiction of the US Department of State in 2013 and recently rejected by President Barack Obama.

National newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *USA Today* have been covering the progress of the Keystone pipeline since it was proposed, but smaller and local newspapers have also extensively covered the issue with an outlook that is more sensitive to local areas. These newspapers include the *Lincoln Star Online*, a newspaper based in Lincoln, Nebraska, and *Independent Record*, based in Helena, Montana.

### The Keystone Pipeline

On July 16, 2008, the *Lincoln Star Online* broke the news to their readers about the proposal. They released a map of where TransCanada, the company in charge of the Keystone pipeline, planned to expand the pipeline and then followed up with a separate article, which spelled out the proposal and where it would be built (*Lincoln Star Online* 2008). This article, titled "TransCanada intends expansion of Keystone pipeline," showed no negative bias in its reporting. It was meant to serve as a breaking news article and just explaining the situation to its readers.



Figure 1. The proposed route of the Keystone XL expansion.  
[http://journalstar.com/business/transcanada-intends-expansion-of-keystone-pipeline/article\\_b09a7ea5-3c1e-52c2-b159-29c29309a5fc.html](http://journalstar.com/business/transcanada-intends-expansion-of-keystone-pipeline/article_b09a7ea5-3c1e-52c2-b159-29c29309a5fc.html)

In the latest breaking news published November 6, 2015, titled “Obama rejects Keystone XL,” journalist Nicholas Bergin wrote about President Obama’s rejection of the pipeline and included a personal aspect in the story. The article began with a narrative lead including two landowners, Susan and Bill Dunavan, who were fighting against the expansion (Bergin 2015). The article has an obvious positive slant throughout, as it includes statements from Obama’s report as well as landowners possibly affected praising his decision. It was not until later in the article that Bergin revealed that most people in Nebraska were actually supporting the pipeline and included quotes from Governor Pete Rickettes, TransCanada CEO Russ Gerling and residents who were all supporting the pipeline.

Opinion pieces, written by the public as “Local Views” or by the newspaper staff as editorials, however, were not so balanced and tended to focus on the negative rather than the positive. Out of the first 10 opinion pieces written for the *Lincoln Star Journal*, nine had headlines that focused on the negatives of the pipeline situation such as “TransCanada should back off” (*Lincoln Star Online* 2010). These controversial headlines on the editorials show an obvious sway and, without even reading past the headline, the reader knows how the writer stands.

The newspaper based in Helena, Montana, the *Independent Record*, broke the news to their readers about the Keystone pipeline on July 17, 2008, one day after the *Lincoln Star Journal* did. The two articles were written in the same fashion and focused on the same news with little bias. One difference between them was the obvious focus on readership. The *Lincoln Star Journal* focused their information on Nebraska residents and the *Independent Record* focused theirs on those in Montana. The *Independent Record*’s article, titled “Partnership doubles capacity of crude pipeline” and written by Mike Dennison, did some reporting that the Nebraskan article did not (Dennison 2008). In addition to using TransCanada as a source, Dennison also used former Governor Brian Schweitzer as a source, connecting it even more to the local people.

When the news broke about Obama vetoing the proposal, the *Independent Record* showed an obvious slant in the article, including the headline. The story, written by Tom Lutey on November 6, 2015 and titled “Montana delegation disappointed, outraged by Keystone Pipeline rejection,” began with a negative headline that could have convinced readers that Obama had made the wrong choice without even reading the article (Lutey 2015). The article continued to be one-sided with three sources that all disagreed with Obama’s decision to veto the proposal. None of the sources included the general public, only state and local government officials.

These two newspapers’ coverage of the Keystone XL pipeline showed different ways that national news could be covered with a local perspective. Although the Atlantic Sunrise and PennEast pipelines have not been in the national spotlight as much as the Keystone pipeline was, they are both being covered by media sources in their local areas.

### **The Atlantic Sunrise Pipeline**

Williams, the company in charge of the construction of the Atlantic Sunrise expansion, currently has pipelines that run along the east coast from New York to Georgia. The controversy that exists now with the company is the proposed expansion into northeastern Pennsylvania. Lancaster County, specifically, has been against the project.



Figure 2. The proposed route for the Atlantic Sunrise Pipeline. <http://thetimes-tribune.com/news/williams-files-atlantic-sunrise-pipeline-application-1.1856542>

On February 21, 2014, *Lancaster Online* journalist Tim Stuhldreher wrote about the new proposal announced by Williams. The article, titled “Proposed Marcellus gas pipeline would run through Lancaster,” laid out the path of the pipeline throughout Pennsylvania. However, it did not include anything that localized the story to those in Lancaster except for a brief statement from Lancaster County Commissioner Scott Martin (Stuhldreher 2015). The article was a balanced piece written with all the necessary information for the people without a local focus.

The pipeline is still a controversy in Lancaster County and the people are skeptical of the progress reports that Williams is making. On November 10, 2015, *Lancaster Online* journalist Ad Crable wrote about the economic implications in an article titled “Energy analyst says Atlantic Sunrise pipeline not good for the public good.” In the article, Crable focused on energy analyst Dennis Witmer, who said that he is a big supporter of natural gas but not of what long-term negative effects the pipeline would have (Crable 2015). Although the story was focused on Witmer, Crable included input from an employee of one of the largest users of Atlantic Sunrise gas, thus balancing the story and staying unbiased.

Just like the two newspapers covering the Keystone XL pipeline, the editorials in the *Lancaster Online* are overwhelmingly negative, with ten of the first opinion pieces being slanted in that direction. The headlines are also slanted negatively including one titled “Not so fast, Williams Partners.” These editorials demonstrate the public’s opinions on the

matter and match up with the negative letters to the editor the newspaper also received (*Lancaster Online* 2014).

### The PennEast Pipeline

The PennEast pipeline, which is proposed to run from Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, to Mercer County, New Jersey, has also been gaining some local coverage in the Lehigh Valley and other affected areas. One Allentown-based newspaper, *The Morning Call*, reported on the newly proposed pipeline expansion on August 13, 2014, with an article titled “Marcellus Shale boom to hit Lehigh Valley: Proposed pipeline would cut through Northampton County,” which was written by Scott Kraus and Laura Olson (Kraus & Olson 2014). As opposed to the other newspapers discussed, *The Morning Call* had the same journalist, Scott Kraus, report on the pipeline story until he passed it along to the journalist now covering it, Christina Tatu. By staying with the same writer, the coverage was more constant and focused than with some of the other newspapers.

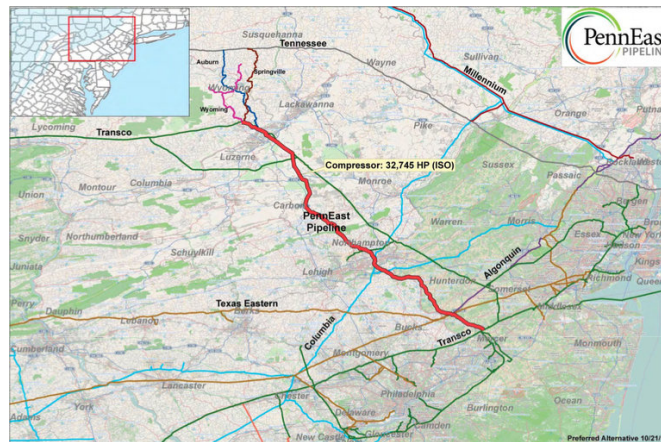


Figure 3. The proposed route for the PennEast Pipeline.  
<http://www.mcall.com/news/breaking/mc-pa-penneast-approval-20141010-story.html>

Like the Atlantic Sunrise pipeline, the PennEast pipeline is still pending approval. Most recently, Christina Tatu published an article titled “More than 1,400 intervenors want to be a part of PennEast Pipeline process,” in which she wrote about those opposed to the pipeline and what the intervenors are doing to try and stop it (Tatu 2015). She balanced her sourcing by talking to officials in the area and a woman involved in an environmental group against the pipeline as well as a PennEast spokeswoman.

*The Morning Call*, as opposed to the other newspapers previously discussed, has not been writing editorials on the PennEast pipeline. This is not surprising because they do not have a very developed opinion section, with only one constant column and opinion pieces written by outside sources. However, the Letters to the Editor written to *The Morning Call* have been negative. Just like *Lancaster Online*, the first 10 Letters to the Editor were all negatively slanted in both the headlines and throughout the letter.

With local media, the news is usually focused on the implications for people in the affected area, whether they are economic, political or social. Because of this, they have the potential to affect the reader's opinion on the subject. When the writing is more focused on a reader personally, he or she may feel even more involved in the subject.

However, the writers and newspapers as a whole could also do a poor job relaying the news to the readers. This might happen when the writing does not capture and hold the reader's attention, or the topic is just not interesting to a majority of readers. For college students, who are the future of environmental initiatives, the topic of pipelines does not seem to be interesting. In a survey of 43 Lehigh University students, about 37 percent of these students had never heard of the pipeline issues in the United States, as compared to the 23 percent of students who said they know a lot about the topic.

Even for those who are informed about the pipelines, the media may have no effect on their viewpoints. In the survey of Lehigh students, 79 percent of them said that the media had no effect on their already-formed viewpoints on the pipeline issues when he or she read an article on the issue, 16 percent said they saw a negative effect and only 5 percent saw a positive effect.

With all of the articles and opinion pieces written on the pipeline issues in the United States, the views of the public may not always be affected as much as some expect. The goal of a reporter, according to the agenda-setting theory, is to tell the public not what to think, but what to think about. By simply writing about the controversy surrounding the pipelines in the United States, the media is telling the public what to think about and it may even be subconsciously affecting their viewpoints on the topic.

## Profiles of Important Players

### 1. Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) is an independent agency that regulates the interstate transmission and rates of natural gas, as well as electricity and oil. They review and approve—or reject—proposals to build natural gas pipelines to ensure that the route of the proposed pipeline is safe and efficient. Because they have such a large part in the approval decision of pipelines in the United States, representatives from the agency are often sources in media articles on pipelines. They can provide a professional look into why the pipeline is approved or rejected in terms of its safety.

The agency was formed in 1920 under its original name of Federal Power Commission and in 1938, the Natural Gas Act gave FERC jurisdiction over the interstate natural gas pipelines. The agency is made up of five commissioners and one chairman, all of who have one vote on decisions. To contact them, FERC has several phone numbers and emails on their website [www.ferc.gov](http://www.ferc.gov), as well as directions on how to find their headquarters in Washington, DC.

### 2. Delaware River Basin Commission

A regional government agency, the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) was formed in 1961 as an interstate compact between Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey and New York, all states in which the Delaware River flows. Because the agency is involved with the Delaware River watershed, where the PennEast Pipeline is proposed to run through, they are deeply scrutinizing the proposal. However, their review of the proposal will not affect the pipeline's scheduled construction, according to representatives from the PennEast Pipeline (Kraus 2014). Because the DRBC's main responsibility is the upkeep the Delaware River region, they are often sources in articles about the PennEast Pipeline.

The people who made up the commission include the governors of all four states as well as the North Atlantic Division Engineer in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. To contact them, their mailing addresses as well as their telephone number are available on their website, [www.nj.gov/drbc](http://www.nj.gov/drbc).

### 3. TransCanada

The company that proposed the expansion of the Keystone XL Pipeline, TransCanada, currently operates one of the largest natural gas transmission networks in North America with about 42,000 miles. Since the Keystone pipeline began operations in 2010, they have delivered over 550 million barrels of Canadian crude oil to markets in the United States.

TransCanada is a source that is necessary in articles about the Keystone Pipeline. A representative of the company should always have the opportunity to explain their plans and ideas to the general public. To contact TransCanada, they have an email address,



mailing addresses and a phone number all available on their website, [www.keystone-xl.com](http://www.keystone-xl.com).

#### **4. PennEast Pipeline**

The company developing the PennEast Pipeline, the PennEast Pipeline Company, is made up of six counterparts, including Spectra Energy Partners and UGI Energy Sources. Together, these six partners have provided energy to over 3 million customers in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

Just as with TransCanada, the PennEast Company is also a source that should always have an opportunity to speak about their plans in any articles about the PennEast Pipeline. Without their say, the article would be unbalanced. To contact the PennEast Pipeline Company, their phone number and email address are both available on their website, [www.penneastpipeline.com](http://www.penneastpipeline.com). To contact their main spokesperson, Patricia Kornick, phone (412) 780-4696 or email at [pkornick@penneastpipeline.com](mailto:pkornick@penneastpipeline.com).

#### **5. Williams Company**

Williams is a pipeline company that operates on both the east and west coast. In the east, the Transco Pipeline is the country's largest interstate natural gas pipeline with its mainline stretching 1,800 miles between South Texas and New York City. It is this pipeline that the Atlantic Sunrise Pipeline would expand from.

Williams, along with the previous two companies, should also always have an opportunity to include their voice in an article about one of their pipelines. To contact them, their phone numbers and email are available on their website, [www.co.williams.com](http://www.co.williams.com).

## “Go-to” Websites

### 1. Penn State Extension (<http://extension.psu.edu/>)

The Penn State Extension, a website funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, provides information for a number of topics, including natural gas. Their website is laid out well with easy-to-find links to several areas of the topics. It separates information into categories for landowners, community and government, and businesses. They have detailed maps that show Marcellus Shale regions in the United States and a page to share important contacts for more information.

### 2. StateImpact (<https://stateimpact.npr.org/>)

A website begun in 2011 by National Public Radio stations, StateImpact examines how policy and issues affect the general public. Their reporting focuses on separate topics for each state involved, with Pennsylvania’s topic being energy. They then break down the topic of energy into the issues of regulation, economy, influence and impact and provide background information for each subtopic, such as Marcellus Shale and fracking.

### 3. Marcellus Drilling News (<http://marcellusdrilling.com/>)

Editor of Marcellus Drilling News, Jim Willis, boasts the fact that he gathers all of the information from the Internet on Marcellus Shale that would be most interesting to landowners and puts it in one place for the reader’s convenience. Additionally, the website has a detailed list of links for more information, breaking them down into several subsections, such as those who support and oppose drilling, government organizations and energy services. Although this website focuses on drilling for natural gas, it also has an abundant amount of articles on pipelines.

### 4. Inside Climate News (<http://insideclimatenews.org/>)

Inside Climate News is a non-profit organization that covers several topics concerning the environment, such as natural gas. Apart from covering the topics with occasional updates, the small group of 13 journalists also conducts investigative reporting, which they then compile into an e-book available for those members of a general public who want to read deeper into the issues. Some of these focus on energy topics, such as “Exxon: The Road Not Taken” and “Keystone and Beyond,” and although pipelines are not covered in these e-books, there is a lot of information for pipelines on the website.

### 5. Pipelines International (<http://pipelinesinternational.com/>)

While the other websites focused on national news surrounding environmental issues, including the pipelines, Pipelines International looks broadly at all of the pipeline issues in the world. The website, which is also a magazine, allows for visitors to limit their search to pipeline projects, integrity and maintenance, machinery and equipment, operations and

certain regions of the world. This allows for readers to compare the pipeline issues in North America with the worldwide issues.

**6. The Guardian (<http://www.theguardian.com/>)**

*The Guardian* is a British international daily news site that commonly covers environmental topics in its reporting, with pipelines among these topics. This media site is not strictly environmental, so they do not have a separate section for energy or pipelines. However, because it is not specifically an environmental news site, the articles published by *The Guardian* might reach an even larger audience environmental sites.

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### **Appendix A: Survey Questions and Answers (SurveyMonkey)**

1. Q: Have you heard of the issues concerning pipelines in the United States (e.g. the Keystone pipeline, PennEast pipeline)?
  - A: Yes, I know a lot about it—23.26 %, 10 students
  - B: Yes, I've heard about it but I'm not sure what's going on—39.53%, 17 students
  - C: No, I haven't heard anything about it—37.21%, 16 students
  
2. Q: Have you found out most of the information through national or local news?
  - A: National news—43.24%, 19 students
  - B: Local news—14.29%, 6 students
  - C: I haven't heard anything about this issue—40.48%, 17 students
  
3. Q: How have your viewpoints on these issues been affected by the media?
  - A: Negatively—16.28%, 7 students
  - B: Positively—4.65%, 2 students
  - C: No effect—79.07%, 34 students
  
4. Q: Specifically, what media outlet do you get most of your information from?
  - A: From New York Times (6 responders), the Skimm (4), Social media (5), CNN (5) and The Morning Call (1), among a few others.