

This just in: The world is ending. Stay tuned for our analysis of how this will affect the election.

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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Last night, Congress came within a single senator's vote of passing legislation to authorize a major crude oil pipeline from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico that would pump more than 830,000 barrels of high-polluting tar sands oil a day and [carry and emit 51 coal plants worth of CO2](#) (pdf)—despite the fact that U.S. oil demand is falling and, you know, the planet is burning up—in exchange for [35 whole permanent jobs](#).

I'm sorry, I buried the lede: what I meant to say is that the runoff Senate race in Louisiana hasn't happened yet, and both candidates—one the incumbent, the other a House member—have sponsored pro-Keystone pipeline legislation and have been keen to win a vote and then take credit for it on the stump. So last night's vote was entirely about electoral politics: will the GOP have a 54-46 majority in the new Senate, or the game-changingly different margin of 53-47?

I suppose it's hard to blame the media for covering Sen. Landrieu's Keystone vote and [its near passage](#) like the [political stunt that](#) it was. Still, this is depressing stuff. The most powerful legislature in the world took up a measure that would be a significant setback in the effort to avoid global environmental catastrophe, but it's all just a backdrop for the important questions: who will win, the senator who wants to double down on our oil addiction? Or her challenger, who also does? And will the latter's party end up with a small majority or a slightly smaller one?

Yes, the pipeline's just one more prop in a political play about nothing more than politics itself, a play in which actual policy is used mostly just to dress the set. But when the political stakes are this low and the policy stakes this high, it really highlights just how sad this is.