

Dakota Access pipeline to continue despite concerns for sacred sites, water

by [Christian Century staff](#) in the [March 1, 2017](#) issue

President Trump issued memoranda advancing the construction of “high priority infrastructure projects,” including one specifically about the Dakota Access pipeline, despite opposition from the indigenous people who have documented the construction’s threat to sacred sites, burial plots, and water supply. At the same time, the Standing Rock Sioux, for safety reasons, sought to evacuate camps of those who have been blocking pipeline construction.

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe issued a statement saying the president’s memorandum January 24 telling the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to “review and approve in an expedited manner” the Dakota Access pipeline, planned to extend from the oil fields of North Dakota to Illinois, violated both U.S. law and tribal treaties. On February 7, [the Army Corps gave "notice of an intent" to grant the easement](#) for construction to continue.

“We are not opposed to energy independence,” said David Archambault II, chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, in a statement. “We are opposed to reckless and politically motivated development projects, like DAPL, that ignore our treaty rights and risk our water.”

The president owned stock in Energy Transfer Partners, the company building the Dakota Access pipeline, through at least mid-2016, according to Reuters. His nominee for U.S. energy secretary, Rick Perry, was—until recently—a member of its board. The company’s chief executive, Kelcy Warren, donated \$100,000 to the Trump campaign.

As many as 8,000 people—including members of more than 300 global indigenous groups—had gathered in camps in the hills along the Cannonball River in North Dakota in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux’s insistence on being consulted on the placement of the pipeline. Several mainline denominations have backed those efforts, sending supplies to the camps. In November John Floberg, an Episcopal priest on the Standing Rock reservation, assembled hundreds of clergy in Cannon Ball, North Dakota, to show support.

In the fall, construction damaged ancient burial sites of the Lakota and Dakota people, Archambault wrote in a statement.

“The desecration of family graves is something that most people could never imagine,” he wrote. “Our water, our resources and our lives are at risk because of this pipeline. Our sacred places that we have lost can never be replaced.”

Since April of last year, Sioux people have been setting up camps along the proposed route of the pipeline. Numbers swelled in the summer. In December the Obama administration ordered a study to produce an environmental impact statement, with the public comment period beginning in mid-January.

Before the current administration issued its memoranda, the Standing Rock Sioux had asked those resisting the pipeline construction to leave the camps. “The tribe is not expelling people,” Floberg told Episcopal News Service. But council leaders are concerned that the harshness of the winter could be fatal. There is also concern about flooding when the snowpack in the area melts, which could overtake the camps.

LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, who has been hosting people opposing the pipeline on her own land along the Cannonball River, [wrote February 4](#) that police and government officials had come to the area to remove people, including those who were in prayer ceremonies at the time of the officers’ arrival.

“This movement was started by the people, and led by our youth,” she wrote. “The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe’s decision to negotiate with the State and disown the people who came to fight for our water is what could ultimately be our downfall.”

*A version of this article, which includes reports from Religion News Service, Episcopal News Service, and United Methodist News Service, appears in the March 1 print edition under the title “Dakota pipeline to go on, president orders, despite concerns of Sioux people.”*