



Gus Speth arrested in front of the White House. Photo Credit: Shadia Fayne Wood

Two weeks of [civil disobedience and protest](#) against the Keystone XL pipeline ends this Saturday (Sept. 3), with a rally and final sit-in. Over 1,000 people have been arrested, including my former professor , Gus Speth.

The protestors want President Obama to deny a permit to construct a pipeline to bring oil from Canadian tar sands to the Midwest and Texas—a nearly 2000 mile trek. The pipeline would cross major rivers and the Ogallala aquifer, one of the largest aquifers in the world and the primary source of water for much of the Midwest. Further, extracting oil from the tar sands is a [horrifically dirty](#), energy-intensive process, much [more so](#) than conventional oil extraction. A decision on the permit will be made by the [State Department](#), likely in December of this year.

You know you are at the bottom of the ninth when you are schlepping a tonne of sand to get a barrel of oil. — [Jeff Rubin](#)

Meanwhile, President Obama took advantage of the pending long weekend to quietly announce that EPA will abandon revisions to the low-level ozone standard. The decision leaves in place, for now, a less stringent Bush administration standard. It would appear that

President Obama's focus is perceived short-term political gain, to the detriment of the long-term health of our communities. And to tell the truth, I just don't see how caving on this ozone standard will help the President politically.

Both of these key decisions—Keystone XL and low-level ozone—will serve to increase the great inequality that is becoming the defining characteristic of America today. On that point, I encourage you to read Gus Speth's article describing America's last place standing among the 20 major advanced countries: <http://www.thesolutionsjournal.com/node/951>. Make no mistake: oil from Canada's tar sands will not save Americans money at the gas pump and will not bring sustainable jobs. And even if the rejection of more stringent ozone rules helped small businesses (it doesn't), it would still come on the backs of low-income urban communities throughout America. Inequality in today's America is inextricably linked to environmental health in urban America.

Environmental justice groups, for one, should be appalled by the ozone decision and by the possibility that the Administration would approve Keystone XL. And so, I would hope that the protests against Keystone XL are only the beginning.