



Modern Policy Formulation Flowchart

Well, no, we probably can't. But President Obama might be well advised to try.

Republicans are currently trying to force the White House into approving the pipeline. [Nebraska's Governor recently flip-flopped and supported Keystone](#), saying now that he trusts TransCanada to do the necessary environmental work to protect the state's economically sensitive Sandhill region. In response, [the State Department has delayed making the decision until March](#). All the politics here seem to be about putting the onus on the other guy, which is hardly a recipe for good policy, but seems to be pretty much all the Republicans are capable of doing nowadays. It's policy formulation as ping-pong.

Environmentalists hate the project because they fear that allowing the development of tar sands will keep the world hooked on fossil fuels. There is something to be said for this, but at the end of the day, I fear that just saying no doesn't move the discussion any further and makes the environmental movement look like Luddites.

Instead, the administration's policy should be that it will approve Keystone XL if and when a comprehensive climate change policy is in place. If fossil fuels have to pay the price of the damage that they cause — whether through a carbon tax, some sort of cap-and-trade system, or through a Federal Implementation Policy promulgated by the EPA — then Keystone can and should proceed under the same rules that everyone else has to abide by.

So it's a clear offer to the Republicans: I will approve Keystone as part of a comprehensive federal climate policy. If I have to go it alone through authority given to me in the Clean Air Act and *Massachusetts v. EPA*, then I will. Of course, we can do this a lot faster through legislation. The ball is in your court.