

With a deal struck to extend the payroll tax cut that includes a provision bypassing the review process for the controversial Keystone tar sands pipeline, Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) is leading House Democrats in calling on President Obama to reject the pipeline because of this extraneous provision.

Despite the ongoing review process that is scheduled to conclude in 2013, as well as an ongoing investigation into the review process by the State Department Inspector General, the payroll tax cut extension passed by the Senate Saturday requires a decision on the tar sands pipeline within 60 days.

In a letter to the President, Welch writes, "We strongly oppose an expedited review process and urge you to reject the tar sands pipeline project because of the unnecessary and inappropriate short circuiting of the review process."

Welch has been a leader in Congress opposing the Keystone pipeline. At the urging of Welch and others, the State Department Inspector General recently opened an investigation into possible conflicts of interest in the pipeline review process.

The House is expected to vote on the payroll tax cut extension proposal early next week.

The full text of Welch's letter is copied below.

Dear Mr. President:

We strongly believe the Keystone tar sands pipeline poses a serious threat to the environment and public health that cannot be mitigated by the benefits of the project. And we fully support your recent decision to extend the ongoing review process.

We are disappointed that legislation to extend the payroll tax cut includes an extraneous provision to expedite approval of the tar sands pipeline. This expedited process will bypass a thorough review of the project as well as an ongoing investigation of the review process by the State Department Inspector General.

We strongly oppose an expedited review process and urge you to reject the tar sands pipeline because of the unnecessary and inappropriate short circuiting of the review process.

PETER WELCH

Member of Congress