

[Burlington Free Press](#)

The State Department's inspector general will review the Obama administration's handling of a Canadian company's request to pipe oil from western Canada to Texas, following complaints from 13 Democratic lawmakers and one independent.

Inspector General Harold W. Geisel said the special review will center on whether the State Department followed all federal laws and regulations related to the \$7 billion Keystone XL project. The 1,700-mile pipeline would carry oil derived from tar sands in Alberta, Canada, to refineries in Houston and Port Arthur, Texas.

The pipeline would travel through Montana, South Dakota, Kansas, Nebraska and Oklahoma before reaching Texas.

Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., and Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt., said Monday that they welcomed the move. Both had asked the Inspector General's Office to review whether conflicts of interest have tainted the review. TransCanada, the company proposing the Keystone XL pipeline project, was allegedly allowed to screen private firms competing to perform an environmental impact study on the pipeline, the news release from the two members of the Vermont delegation stated. In addition, Cardno Entrix, which was chosen to conduct the study, has significant financial ties to TransCanada, Sanders and Welch said.

Sanders said Monday that President Obama should delay a decision on the pipeline request until the inspector general's investigation is finished. The administration has said it expects to decide by the end of the year, although in recent days officials have hinted that timeline could slip.

"This is a critically important issue for our environment and the energy future of our country," Sanders said in a prepared statement. "At a time when all credible scientific evidence and opinion indicate that we are losing the battle against global warming, it is imperative that we have objective environmental assessments of major carbon-dependent energy projects."

Welch said: "The American people have a right to know how the State Department reached its conclusion. This investigation is a step in the right direction."

One day earlier, about 40 St. Michael's College students and two professors participated in a protest against the pipeline at the White House. During Sunday's rally, the crowd linked hands to surround the White House, keeping up pressure on President Barack Obama as his administration decides whether to approve the pipeline project. The State Department has authority over the project because it crosses a U.S. border.

The Colchester-based college's contingent, which traveled by bus from Vermont to Washington, was among the largest sent by any institution of higher learning, according to a tweet from activist group Tarsandaction. Accompanying the students were St. Michael's English professor Greg Delanty and biology professor Valerie Banschbach.

Dan Quigley, a St. Michael's freshman, told The Associated Press on Sunday that the pipeline could have an adverse effect on greenhouse gases and pose a hazard to water supplies.

"It's putting a lot of time and effort into something that's pulling us into a wrong direction," he told the news wire service. "If we are going to do anything this large scale, it has to be something that's proactive for helping the environment."

Another Vermonter, Bill McKibben of Middlebury, has been among the driving forces behind the protests since summer. McKibben, founder of 350.org, said demonstrators hoped Obama would live up to the image that helped him win election in 2008.