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Students Protest XL Pipeline in D.C.

By [Emilie Munson](#)

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On Sunday Feb. 17, over 50 students and Schumann Distinguished Scholar Bill McKibben attended the “Forward On Climate” rally in Washington, D.C. The rally, sponsored by 350.org, the Sierra Club and the Hip-Hop Caucus, was the largest climate rally in American history, with approximately 40,000 participants.

“It was really cool to be a part of [the rally] and to just look back and see [thousands of] people behind you, all there for climate change,” explained Hannah Bristol ’14.5 who attended the rally. “It felt like we were really making ourselves heard.”

The goal of the rally was primarily to protest the Keystone XL pipeline project, which seeks to build a pipeline to transport crude oil from Canada to various locations in the western

United States. President of the United States Barack Obama is currently faced with the decision of whether or not to approve the project.

During the rally and their march around the White House, the students held a collection of signs which, when viewed together from above, created the image of a pipeline and when flipped, looked like solar panels.

McKibben, who gave a speech at the rally praising the group gathered and urging them to continue their fight for climate change, views Obama's decision about the Keystone pipeline project as pivotal to environmental activism.

"If Obama rejects it, he'll be the first leader to turn down a project on climate grounds — that's a legacy and also a way to convince other countries to do the right thing," said McKibben.

"We hope that the rally showed President Obama that he does have a huge amount of support from his constituents for him to take executive action on environmental issues, starting with the official denial of the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline," added Laura Berry '16, who was the student organizer for the trip to the rally.

Bristol emphasized that this rally was not an attempt to "bash" Obama, but merely to hold him to promises he previously made.

"For Obama, climate change is an issue he always says he is going to put as a priority, but we have yet to see action," said Bristol. "In the State of the Union, he said that if Congress does not take action on climate change, he would, and we need to hold him to that promise."

Prior to the rally, the group attended the Youth Convergence on Sunday morning, organized by the Sierra Student Coalition. Students had the opportunity to meet with other college students to discuss steps they are taking to address environmental issues, as well as hear from speakers from 350.org and the Sierra Club.

"[There are] a lot of good lessons to learn about things you can do on your college campus," said Bristol.

Additionally, students working on the College's divestment campaign had the chance to meet with other student leaders from schools in the Investure consortium — Dickinson, Smith and Barnard — to plan future efforts.

Divestment is the issue area where McKibben suggests that Middlebury students concerned about climate change should "work like crazy."

"Midd students have a lot of leverage right now to help with this crisis, if we can persuade our leaders on campus to do the right thing," he said.

Bristol believes students should work on promoting more nationwide movements like the "Forward On Climate" rally to generate political pressure for environmental issues.

"It will only be salient for our representatives if it's salient for the people," urged Bristol. "I

think the best thing Middlebury College students can do is build that kind of movement, build that kind of pressure and do whatever they can do to stop what’s happening.”

Laura Berry '16 challenges the student body to pay attention.

“There is no longer an excuse for individuals to remain silent and complacent when it comes to environmental issues," wrote Berry in an email. "Take just a moment to think about your own plans for the future, and realize that if we as individuals continue to do nothing, there very well may not be a habitable planet to live on by the time we are our parents’ age. Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better.”

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