

Police attack on Dakota Access Pipeline protest results in 300 injuries

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Another violent clash between Dakota Access Pipeline protesters and police late Sunday night led to approximately 300 injuries among the protesters, 26 of whom required professional medical attention. Some of the cases include a woman with a serious eye injury after being shot in the face by a rubber bullet, a tribe elder who lost consciousness and was revived on scene, a young man with internal bleeding who was vomiting blood after a being hit in the abdomen by a rubber bullet, and a man with blunt force trauma and severe head lacerations after being struck by a rubber bullet near his spine, among many others.

The most seriously injured was 21-year-old Sophia Wilansky, who protesters claim was directly hit by a concussion grenade thrown by police, an allegation denied by local law enforcement, which severely damaged her hand and arm.

Wilansky was airlifted to a hospital in Minneapolis and underwent her first eight-hour surgery the same day. The woman's father reported that Sophia is facing possible arm amputation adding that she may need as many as 20 surgeries over many months to have any chance of saving her arm and hand. In the best case scenario, her father reports, she will only recover 10 to 20 percent functionality of her arm.

The incident took place at about 6 p.m. at Backwater Bridge, just north of the main encampment near Cannon Ball, North Dakota, where about 100 activists attempted to remove two burned trucks which have served as a barricade for police over the last several weeks. The barricade has raised safety concerns for the residents of the camp and the reservation, as it blocks the most direct route from the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation to Bismarck, North Dakota, forcing all traffic to take a 20-mile detour.

Authorities reportedly responded with tear gas,

pepper spray, rubber bullets and a water hose. The decision to use the water hose, despite below freezing temperatures in the area, led to multiple cases of hypothermia and has been highly criticized by the public.

While the authorities claim the water hoses were originally brought out to put out fires started by protesters, Maxine Herr, the Morton County Sheriff's spokeswoman, defended the decision to use the hoses against the protesters, claiming that "aggression from the agitators in the camp continued to raise their level of resistance against law enforcement." The department called the situation Sunday night "an ongoing riot" and described the protesters as being "very aggressive."

Wilansky's statement, relayed by her father as well as protesters said to have witnessed the incident, indicates that the young woman sustained her injuries from a concussion grenade thrown by police later that night.

The response from the Sheriff's department was complete denial. "It wasn't from our law enforcement, because we didn't deploy anything that should have caused that type of damage to her arm," Herr stated, adding, "We're not sure how her injury was sustained." Herr suggested that the young woman may have been injured while protesters were "rigging up their own explosives." However, no propane bottles were reported to have been exploded, and no protesters have been arrested for making or throwing explosives.

Activists and protesters have rejected these allegations. One independent filmmaker and photographer who has been documenting the protests, Rafe Scobey-Thal, described the police response as being "completely out of proportion".

Hundreds of posts on social media corroborate the protesters' reports. Chilling videos and photographs

show a highly militarized police force complete with armored vehicles and shields standing off against unarmed activists who are often singing or praying.

In addition to obtaining authorization to spend \$10 million to put down the ongoing demonstration, North Dakota Governor Jack Dalrymple has summoned hundreds of officers from neighboring states and activated the National Guard. These actions have become standard operating procedure for suppressing protests in America.

The police force at Standing Rock—in addition to tasers, pepper spray and tear gas—is armed with single-shot 40mm launchers that shoot foam baton rounds, 12-gauge shotguns that fire one of several different “crowd control” payloads ranging from bean bags to neoprene bullets, and sound cannons called LRADs (Long-Range Acoustic Device), all described as “less-than-lethal” weaponry.

Over 400 protesters have been arrested since the start of the demonstration. Reports of detainees being marked with numbers and held in cages have prompted allegations of human rights abuses. One member of the Chemehuevi tribe, Caro Gonzales, said she was held by police in what she described as a “dog kennel” with three other women.

The law enforcement response to the protest has prompted powerful backlash from people all throughout the country and the world. In addition to the hundreds of people who have joined the native tribes on at the demonstrations themselves, 180 different tribal nations have sent letters of solidarity and over 1.7 million people have “checked in” to Standing Rock on Facebook to show their support. A fundraising page set up for Sophia Wilansky raised more than \$120,000 from more than 4,000 donors in the first seven hours. At the time of this writing, the account had reached over \$347,000, raised from 12,721 people in just two days.

Despite the overwhelming support by broad masses of people, the political establishment has remained largely silent. President Obama spoke gingerly on the topic after months of refusing to comment, saying, “We’re monitoring this closely and I think as a general rule, my view is that there is a way for us to accommodate sacred lands of Native Americans, and I think that right now the army corps is examining whether there are ways to reroute this pipeline.”

Both social media posts and local reports suggest that the protesters and the public alike find the president’s remarks to be at best, too little too late. One member of the Nuu-chah-nulth tribe, Xhopakelxhit, told the *Guardian* that the president’s actions were “cowardly but not surprising,” asking, “why has he not made a more forceful statement in favor of us? He’s basically trying to cover all his bases without actually doing anything.” Denouncing the prospect of a last-minute rerouting of the pipeline as “completely laughable,” Xhopakelxhit expressed little faith in the Obama administration stepping in on their side.

For his part, president-elect Donald Trump enjoys close financial ties to the pipeline operator, Energy Transfer Partners.

Financial disclosure forms reveal that CEO Kelcy Warren, chief executive of Energy Transfer Partners, has given \$103,000 to elect Trump and provided \$66,800 to the Republican National Committee since Trump secured the GOP’s presidential nomination.

Also revealed in Trump’s filings to the Federal Election Commission is a \$500,000 to \$1 million investment in Energy Transfer Partners, as well as \$500,000 to a \$1 million holding in Phillips 66, the company which will have a 25 percent stake in the Dakota Access project once completed.

In a recent statement, Warren stated that “Dakota Access Pipeline has waited long enough to complete this pipeline ... It is time for the Courts to end this political interference and remove whatever legal cloud that may exist over the right-of-way beneath federal land at Lake Oahe”.

Energy Transfer Partners will likely find a strong ally in the new presidency, as Trump has declared his support for lifting all restrictions on the exploitation of untapped natural resources.

“I’m 100 percent sure that the pipeline will be approved by a Trump administration,” Warren told NBC News on Saturday. “I believe we will have a government in place that believes in energy infrastructure.”



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