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Environmental activists to rally to move forward on the climate

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Eco Catholic

What a way to spend the First Sunday of Lent: standing up for clean energy and creation care with thousands of like-minded souls. On Sunday, thousands of people from faith-based and environmental groups along with climate scientists will be doing just that in Washington, D.C., at the Forward on Climate rally. It promises to be the largest climate rally gathering in U.S. history, say the organizers from 350.org, The Sierra Club and the Hip Hop Caucus.

The rally comes less than a week after President Barack Obama promised to address climate change during his State of the Union speech on Tuesday. Although Obama vowed to work on behalf of wind and solar clean energy sources, he continues to support oil drilling and fracking as well, a real worry for environmentalists. Another major concern is the possibility he could OK the Keystone XL pipeline, a TransCanada project that will connect Canadian tar sands with oil refiners in Texas.

The Franciscan Action Network characterizes the pipeline as "the second largest and dirtiest oil reserves on the planet." (For more information, check out the network's extensive information sources on the tar sands and climate change.)

Rally participants will demand that Obama reject the pipeline. The gathering will be a peaceful one, with no civil disobedience planned.

But civil disobedience has already happened. On Wednesday, some of the organizers staged a pre-rally confrontation with police. Among the 48 protesters were Bill McKibben from 350.org; James Hansen, NASA's head climatologist; Waterkeeper Alliance president Robert F. Kennedy Jr.; actor Daryl Hannah; civil rights leader Julian Bond; and Sierra Club executive director Michael Brune. These and

others were arrested for blocking a sidewalk in front of the White House and attaching themselves to the tall iron fence around it, according to an article in *The Washington Post*.

Hansen told the *Post* the fact that Obama can talk about promoting renewal energy and oil and gas production "shows he doesn't get it."

"We have reached a fork in the road," he said, "and the politicians have to understand we either go down this road of exploiting every fossil fuel we have -- tar sands, tar shale, off-shore drilling in the Arctic -- but the science tells us we can't do that without creating a situation where our children and grandchildren will have no control over, which is the climate system."

Bond, longtime civil rights activist, told the *Post* that civil disobedience was again needed: "When you find that ordinary methods of persuasion are not working, you turn to other methods, and this is peaceful, nonthreatening and has been successful in the past, and there is no reason to believe it won't be successful here."

Bond said the pipeline would mostly provide a route for oil sands to reach world markets rather than be a pipeline for America.

"It's a pipeline through America, and it threatens to be a disaster for us if it leaks poisons on the way," he told the *Post*.

Kennedy told the *Post* he prefers to challenge projects in court but chose to be arrested because legal avenues had been closed off by friends of the oil industry.

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"They have so rigged the system that we cannot go to court," he said. He said the oil industry has turned Congress into "indentured servants" and that "even Obama in his State of the Union has to doff his cap to big oil and genuflect to them."

Meanwhile, for those who cannot make it to Washington on Sunday for the major rally, there will be a number of solidarity gatherings throughout the United States, including California, Washington state, Nebraska, Montana, Minnesota, Michigan and Texas.

Greenpeace USA in a press release Tuesday announced people can watch the rally online.

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