Friends of the Earth



Why does a pipeline company have a greater voice in Congress than the people?

The Williams Companies influence in shaping permitting legislation

The blue wave in the midterm elections overwhelmingly rejected Trump and the GOP's corporations-first, communities-last policies. Yet, some Democrats in the Senate are allowing the GOP to push through a massive new gift to the fossil fuel industry. This permitting bill, known as the Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act (BAAJA), would gut keystone environmental protections, making it easier for projects to be built without regard to community objections or environmental harms. Not only that, but once permits are issued, BAAJA attempts to lock them in by removing future administrative authority to revisit past permitting decisions.

One of the loudest proponents of BAAJA is Alan Armstrong of Oklahoma, a former pipeline executive temporarily appointed to the Senate in early 2026, after Trump tapped Markwayne Mullin to run the Department of Homeland Security. Prior to this appointment, Alan Armstrong was head of Williams Companies, a pipeline giant that he ran for 14 years and worked at since 1986.

Senator Armstrong's final act as a lawmaker may be to deliver on two key demands long sought by Williams Companies, which paid him nearly $18 million in 2025. Williams is in the process of expanding new and existing pipelines intended to meet speculative data center power demands with their fossil gas. BAAJA's attacks on environmental protections seem to be perfectly designed to enable this proposed buildout of fossil infrastructure.

Williams Companies executives have clearly laid out how they are leveraging access to Congress and the Trump Administration to decrease environmental protections required by the permitting process:

- Alan S. Armstrong, Williams CEO (at the time), current Senator, *"the administration is working hard to clear any barriers that exist... But, none of that really changes the fact of the permitting process being very exposed to litigation and to obstructive environmentalists throwing wrenches in projects and filing suits that tie the projects up. So, that's the piece that the judicial reform in the legislative process needs to be fixed and we're certainly going to work on that."* (May 2025)

- Terrance Lane Wilson, Williams Sr. VP and General Counsel, *"I think we have a seat at the table previously, and we certainly have one now. And probably the biggest thing that could happen ... would be permitting reform"* (August, 2025)

- Chad Zamarin, Williams CEO, *"The Senate is working on advancing permitting reform this year. And we're lucky to have a very strong delegation from here in Oklahoma, including Alan, who was appointed recently to fill Markwayne Mullin's seat. We will continue to advocate for meaningful permitting reform."* (May 2026)

Williams Companies has also been public about the two key demands that they are using their influence to achieve:

1) Williams called for: *"we need judicial reform... It's just too easy to tie projects up in litigation" (earnings call, May 2026) and to "[remove] the ability for courts to vacate or enjoin agency actions under NEPA"* (blog post, Sep 2026)

BAAJA delivers: Significantly restricts the ability of the public to seek judicial review of harmful projects, and of courts to issue meaningful relief when there is unlawful agency action

BAAJA contains several attacks on the public's ability to seek judicial review of unlawful decisions by chopping the timeline to file legal action from 6 years to 150 days, limiting the types of claims that can be brought before a judge by requiring all claims to be first raised in prior public comment, and requiring all claims to have a direct harm on the litigant.

BAAJA also ties the judiciary's hands by requiring the court to grant "substantial deference" to agencies when evaluating NEPA documents. It also limits a judge's ability to prevent a harmful project from proceeding during a lawsuit and points final judicial remedies toward agency remand instead of vacatur. In other words, even when a project is found to be unlawful, under BAAJA a judge can only tell an agency to go back to the drawing board and paper over the bad decision, with the underlying, unlawful project going forward the entire time.

2) Williams called for: [Make sure that] *"a single state can't stop a project through the 401 process"* (earnings call, May 2026)

BAAJA delivers: restrictions on the state and Tribal authority to protect their waterways through Clean Water Act 401 authority

401 authority refers to a requirement under the Clean Water Act that projects, like the Williams pipelines, apply for and secure a water quality certification from states and Tribes where the project crosses their waterways. Although these certifications are rarely denied, it is a chip in the shoulder for Williams, as the denial of this 401 certification in New York stymied Williams' Constitution pipeline a decade ago and more recently the Court overturned Williams New Jersey 401 permit for its Northeast Supply Enhancement (NESE) pipeline.

Rather than address how their pipeline proposals would pollute waterways, Williams has turned to Congress to undercut Section 401 authority. BAAJA Section 1202 will defang the Clean Water Act Section 401 by drastically constraining when and how states and Tribes can evaluate, condition, or deny water quality certifications. Williams Senior Vice President & General Counsel, speaking on the court's NESE decision, stated *"I just don't think there's any doubt that had the BAJA been in effect at the time the Third Circuit considered our permit, we'd still have that permit."*