

Column of Sept 26, 2013. Editor's Headline: "A Disaster Waiting to Happen"

Notwithstanding the advocacy of the Keystone XL pipeline by the Chicago Tribune, reprinted in the September 23 WTE under "Obama, say yes to a new pipeline," the KXL is a terrible idea. The editorial claims that President Obama "keeps finding new excuses" to stall the project when, in fact, the president is awaiting a revised evaluation of the pipeline's environmental impact. No thanks to TransCanada's top lobbyist Paul Elliot, main contributor to then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's war chest, the State Department submitted a report that claims the pipeline would have minimal impact on the environment.

Affected residents as well as environmental groups have mobilized ever since. On September 21, Houstonians demonstrated at the home of KXL's Project Director, protesting the company's seizing of private property.

"I'm here to stand with all the other Texas landowners whose land was stolen by the KXL pipeline," said Jerry Hightower, whose family's land is crossed by KXL and the Exxon Pegasus pipelines. "If [the director] is willing to endanger Texans' property with a fraudulent eminent domain process, he should start with his own."

Houstonians also argue that KXL would bring toxic tar-sands refining to their town's East End and to Port Arthur along Texas's Gulf Coast, which are already among the most polluted in North America. The refining would further increase the environmental burden on these communities.

The same opposition arises against Canadian proposed export trains and ports. In Alabama, residents demonstrated with placards reading: "No Tar Sands via Rail! No Tar Sands Pipelines! No Tar Sands Tank Farms! No Tar Sands in Mobile!" One spokesperson elaborated: "These projects are hazardous to the entire Gulf Coast."

Here are the reasons:

- **THE JOBS MYTH.** According to the Cornell University's Global Labor Institute, the pipeline project will actually destroy more jobs than it temporarily creates. It's no secret that the end product is meant for shipment to Asian markets—hence the need for proximity to the Pacific—and will not address any American needs, real or imagined; if anything, it'll raise petroleum prices in the U.S. Developing a clean energy economy and infrastructure would create—and maintain—far more jobs.
- **SPILLS.** TransCanada had projected that its Keystone 1 pipeline would spill once every seven years; instead, it spilled 12 times in its first year alone. It has spilled more than 30 times over its lifetime. Pipeline-builder Enbridge ignored warning signs for more than five years along its 6B Line, which spilled in July of 2010 in Michigan's Kalamazoo River, causing the most damaging onshore oil spill in US history. Enbridge pipelines are made for regular petroleum transportation, not the (much more corrosive) tar sands goo. Most recently, Exxon has weaseled out of cleanup costs of the Kansas Mayflower spill of 12,000 barrels that leaked when its Pegasus Pipeline ruptured earlier this year. Because of

arcane wording in regulations, the tar sands bitumen does not qualify as “oil,” Exxon argues. Taxpayers are stuck with the costs while Exxon rakes in the profits.

- **WATER CONTAMINATION.** This pipeline threatens the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer in Texas, which supplies drinking water to more than 12 million people living across 60 counties in drought-stricken East Texas. Its cross-border section also threatens the Ogallala Aquifer, the largest aquifer in the western North American region, upon which millions of people and agricultural businesses depend for drinking water, irrigation, and livestock watering.
- **KXL VIOLATES TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY.** The Indigenous Environmental Network has drafted the Mother Earth Accord with traditional treaty councils to preserve the integrity of First Nations and tribal lands across Canada and the United States.
- **COSTS TO THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY.** Alberta’s tar-sands mines exhaust 3 million barrels of fresh water every day. They spew toxic waste into vast sludge lakes that leak dangerous chemicals. Herds of woodland caribou have shrunk by 50 percent, and those that remain carry high toxins in their bodies, especially arsenic, thus endangering the lives of First Nations who depend on hunting. Further, the toxic lakes claim the lives of migratory birds that alight on them. Additionally, the mining compromises the health and subsistence of downwind and downstream communities. In blatant environmental racism, it destroys the livelihoods of nearby First Nations. It generates three to five times more greenhouse gas emissions than conventional oil production, in effect using the equivalent of two barrels of oil to produce three.
- **CLIMATE CHANGE.** NASA’s leading climate scientist, Dr. James Hansen, has called KXL “a fuse to the largest carbon bomb on the planet.” Recently retired, Hansen said that if all the carbon stored in the Canadian tar sands is released into the earth’s atmosphere it’s “game over” for the planet. Already we are dangerously—too dangerously—close to the tipping point. Last year’s wildfires along with Superstorm Sandy, and this year’s flash-flood devastations, bear witness.

The Chicago Tribune does not address these exigencies; instead, it makes much of Canada’s Stephen Harper’s vow to rein in his country’s carbon emissions—provided the U.S. accepts KXL. That’s bribery. If Harper were serious about addressing climate change and atmospheric pollution, by now he’d have undertaken decisive action on the matter. Finally, the editorial claims that Canada “has launched pipeline projects to its east and west coasts.” These projects have not moved forward, since they’ve run up against strenuous opposition on the part of communities who’d bear the environmental burden. David Biello’s article in the July 2013 edition of Scientific American suggests that U.S. rejection of KXL will spell the demise of Alberta’s tar sands production. Is that why Harper is pressuring our president?