

9/8/2010

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House of Representatives
235 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Edward Markey
Chairman, Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming
2108 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Chairman Markey,

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters, we want to thank you for all your efforts to champion renewable energy and transition the United States to a clean energy future.

We understand that you will be visiting Ottawa this week, and that the topic of energy and climate change will be among the matters discussed informally during your visit.

As you prepare for your visit, the undersigned groups from both Canada and the United States would like to highlight our concern with the very serious consequences of reliance on Canadian tar sands oil. Such reliance is an obstacle to developing clean and sustainable energy systems in our countries. Our groups are particularly concerned with the proposal by the Canadian company TransCanada to build the Keystone XL tar sands oil pipeline from Alberta to Texas. We are opposed to the building of this pipeline, as it would lock us into decades of consumption of one of the most environmentally destructive forms of oil in the world and would undermine the U.S. transition to a new energy economy.

The process for extracting and upgrading bitumen from the tar sands generates over three times as much greenhouse gas pollution as the production of conventional oil. On a well to wheels basis, that translates into a 10-30% increase in greenhouse gas emissions per barrel. To date, Canada has presented no action plan to achieve its internationally agreed upon emissions reductions. Tar sands oil is the fastest growing source of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in Canada and a primary reason for Canada's failure to achieve its Kyoto goals. Tar sands production depletes fresh water in Alberta, destroys boreal forests and wetlands, and threatens millions of migratory birds. A recent scientific study confirmed that tar sands development is polluting the Athabasca River watershed. First Nation communities downstream of tar sands development are concerned about unusually high rates of cancer and the violation of land and treaty rights.

Currently, the tar sands industry plans a massive expansion. The Keystone XL pipeline would hasten that expansion, which is incompatible with strong action on climate change. In light of this, 251 business leaders have written to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that "we question whether it is in the national economic interest to diverge off the path toward clean energy by committing massive resources to a project that will prolong American's oil dependence and greatly increase carbon emissions."

Our organizations also believe strongly that the energy security benefits of tar sands oil have been exaggerated. Tar sands oil does not undermine the power of OPEC, does not provide spare capacity in times of shortage due to natural disasters or armed conflict, and

does not lower prices (in fact, it is the most expensive oil in the world). Keystone XL and the associated increase in tar sands production would be both a cause and a symptom of a failure to address climate change and to reduce oil consumption. These failures would make us less secure, as they would lead to conflict and economic risk.

The good news is that, as you know, U.S. oil demand is falling in part due to policies that have increased fuel efficiency. According to the U.S. EPA, there are nearly 7 million barrels of a day (more than a third of current consumption) that could be saved using technology available today. As long term oil demand in the U.S. decreases, there will be no need to increase the supply of the dirtiest oil. With your help as clean energy champions, we can meet our transportation energy demands without furthering development of the most destructive oil in the world.

Again, our groups offer our support in your work to promote clean, renewable energy that creates a healthy future for North American families, and we look forward to continuing our work with you to avoid any expanded reliance on destructive, toxic fuels like tar sands.

Sincerely,

Steve Kozel, Sr.
Board President
The Calumet Project

Jennifer Krill
Executive Director
EARTHWORKS

Peter Lehner
Executive Director
Natural Resources Defense Council

Michael Marx
Executive Director
Corporate Ethics International

Michael Noble
Executive Director
Fresh Energy

Steve Kretzmann
Executive Director
Oil Change International

Michael Brune
Executive Director
Sierra Club

Denny Larson
Executive Director
Global Community Monitor

Larry J. Schweiger
President & CEO
National Wildlife Federation

Mark Trechock
Executive Director
Dakota Resource Council

Rebecca Tarbotton
Executive Director
Rainforest Action Network

Maggie L. Fox
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Margie Alt
Executive Director
Environment America

Winona LaDuke
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Honor the Earth

Tom 'Smitty' Smith
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Public Citizen (Texas Office)

Harlan Hentges
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Tom Goldtooth
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Graham Saul
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Bruce Cox
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Greenpeace Canada

Harvey Scott
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John Bennett
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Todd Paglia
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Will Horter
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Dogwood Initiative