Open Letter to President Obama and Governor Romney: Defend America Against Keystone XL Economic, Public Health & National Security Threats

“And today, I’m directing my administration to cut through the red tape, break through the bureaucratic hurdles, and make this project a priority, to go ahead and get it done.”
- President Obama, speaking about the southern leg of Keystone XL in Cushing, OK (March 22, 2012)

“If I’m president, we’ll build it if I have to build it myself.”
- Governor Romney, commenting on the Keystone XL pipeline in Pittsburgh, PA (May 4, 2012)

Dear President Obama and Governor Romney,

As candidates for president, you both support construction of the southern (OK-TX) leg of Keystone XL, a pipeline that would transport tar sands through the Great Plains from Montana to refineries in Texas.

We call on you to withdraw your support for this project in light of the overwhelming evidence, available to both of you, that Keystone XL threatens America’s economy, public health, and national security.

You both know about the poor safety record of Canadian pipeline companies and the economic danger Keystone XL poses to our nation’s food and water supplies. TransCanada’s Keystone I tar sands pipeline, built two years ago, leaked corrosive tar sands slurry 12 times in its first 12 months. In 2010, a similar pipeline run by another Canadian company spilled more than 1 million gallons of toxic tar sands into Michigan’s Kalamazoo River, sickening hundreds of people, displacing homeowners, wrecking businesses, and destroying jobs. Keystone XL – which would pump tar sands at extreme pressure and temperature across nearly 2,000 U.S. waterways – promises more of the same by allowing for leaks of up to 1.7 million gallons daily without triggering a real-time leak detection system. It is not a matter of if, but when, TransCanada’s 1,700-mile tar sands pipeline will compromise America’s breadbasket by contaminating our Great Plains rivers and aquifers.

You have been informed by twenty prominent scientists – including one of the nation’s top climate experts, Dr. James Hansen – that Keystone XL “would practically guarantee extensive exploitation” of Canada’s tar sands, which “on top of conventional fossil fuels will leave our children and grandchildren a climate system with consequences that are out of their control.” You have also been warned by Dr. Hansen – who along with other scientists links deadly heat waves to climate change – that such exploitation would mean “game over for the climate.” As far back as 2007, an elite Military Advisory Board of 11 retired three- and four-star generals and admirals from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps concluded that “climate change is and must be recognized as a threat to our national security.” Echoing this sentiment, Vice Admiral Lee Gunn, USN (Ret.), president of the bipartisan American Security Project, testified in 2009 before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that taking this national security threat “head on is about preserving our way of life.”

Rural families living in the path of the proposed pipeline are sounding the alarm of impending disaster. Please listen. You need to both stop hiding behind the few thousand temporary construction jobs this project would create and level with the American people. The facts show that Keystone XL:

- Risks destroying more jobs than it creates
- Portends higher, not lower, gas prices for the Midwest and Rockies
- Functions as an export pipeline for Canada to sell its oil to foreign markets
- Threatens to further poison the air of people living near tar sands oil refineries
- Violates tribal sovereignty and tramples on private property rights of U.S. citizens
- Jeopardizes the Ogallala Aquifer, source of 1/3 of America’s farmland irrigation water
- Endangers the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer, which supplies water to more than 10 million Texans

Keystone XL violates so many core American values, it can only be described as un-American. It is time to stop playing politics with American lives and treasure and stand up to energy giant TransCanada. Failure to confront this foreign corporation seeking to enrich itself at our expense is a failure to defend America.

Believe in America! Forward! America’s path to prosperity lies in the rapid transition to abundant homegrown renewable energy and appropriate biofuel resources to power our homes, businesses, and vehicles – not in facilitating pipelines transporting the most destructive oil on earth. Keystone XL represents a retreat from the green economy, which already employs 2.7 million workers (more than the fossil fuel industry). Embrace instead a U.S.-led green industrial revolution that will move our economy forward, create millions of new jobs, and help ensure a livable planet for future generations.

In solidarity with families in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Montana dedicated to nonviolently resisting TransCanada’s toxic pipeline, we are urging everyone we know to challenge you on the campaign trail – between now and Election Day – until you commit to defending America against this imminent threat to our economy, public health,
and national security. We expect you to protect our basic rights to clean air, food, and water, and to put the health, safety, and economic well-being of the American people before foreign corporate interests.

Show us, in the tradition of great Americans who came before you, that you are leaders worthy of the American presidency by courageously standing firm in defense of the land, and planet, we love. Inspire us by sharing a bold vision for the future that is befitting the American people – one marked by innovation, ingenuity, and hope. Seize this historic moment to leave a legacy that will be honored by our children and generations to come.

Sincerely,

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