

The Tar Sands and the Keystone XL Pipeline

Canada is the largest supplier of oil to the United States and most of it comes from the Alberta tar sands. The tar sands cover an area that is roughly the size of Florida in northern Alberta, Canada. They are located underneath Alberta's boreal forest where First Nations communities have lived for centuries. Tar sands are actually a substance called bitumen that is a mixture of sand, clay, and heavy crude oil. After Saudi Arabia, these deposits are the second largest source of oil in the world.

Currently, about 1.5 million barrels of oil are produced in tar sands operations every day. The tar sands continue to expand daily and the Canadian government and industries involved want to double the levels of production. They want to produce 5 million barrels of crude oil daily by 2030.

Recently, TransCanada, a Canadian pipeline company, proposed to build a pipeline that would bring as much as 700,000 barrels a day of crude oil from Alberta's tar sands to refineries in Texas. Here, it would be refined into diesel and other products for export to Europe and Latin America. If approved, the pipeline would begin in Alberta and cross the province of Saskatchewan before crossing through six U.S. states: Montana, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. Environmentalists and indigenous groups strongly oppose the project. They are concerned about spills and carbon emissions from production of oil sands crude.

In order for this pipeline to happen, its construction must be approved by President Obama. This project is unique in that it does not have to go through Congress. Because the Keystone XL Pipeline comes from Canada, it is a foreign project and foreign projects do not need approval from Congress. They need approval from the State Department. So the State Department, under the leadership of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, has to decide whether this pipeline is in the national interest of the United States. If the State Department decides that it is, then President Obama has the last word. He has to sign off on it.

When Obama was campaigning for president, he promised to take environmental issues, especially climate change, seriously. Since he has been in office, many environmentalists feel that he has broken his promises. He says that he wants to do something about climate change but that Congress won't let him. According to environmentalists, here is Obama's chance to prove that he is serious about protecting the environment and reducing climate change. In August, environmentalist and indigenous groups launched a massive campaign designed to tell Obama not to approve this project. They organized two weeks of protest and civil disobedience outside the White House. In November, about 10,000 people circled the White House to protest the pipeline.

Our role play takes place in the days following the protests. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has organized a public hearing at the State Department and has invited some "stakeholders" to discuss and debate the proposed XL pipeline. Groups in attendance include:

- TransCanada
- American Petroleum Institute
- Members of the Republican Party
- Environmental Activists
- Indigenous Environmental Network
- Bold Nebraska

The question for debate at the public hearing is: **Should President Obama approve the construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline?**

Should President Obama approve the construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline?

In preparation for the public hearing:

1. Read your role quietly. Highlight what strikes you as most important. Some roles include links to advertisements that support your arguments. You should watch these in advance and you may want to play these for the class when you introduce your group.
2. Decide who will introduce your group. This person must say a little a bit about your group. Who are your members? What do you stand for? Are you for or against the pipeline?
3. What are your main arguments **for** or **against** the construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline? List them here.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Assign one member of your group to be an expert on each point by:

- 1) explaining it during your introductory remarks
- 2) raising the issue to other groups
- 3) being prepared to defend or respond to that issue when other groups raise it

Summarize your argument here (in your own words):

TransCanada

TransCanada is a Canadian company that builds pipelines and other infrastructure to transport energy throughout North America. At TransCanada we dream big, think big, and do big things! We pride ourselves on our ability to meet the growing demand for energy across North America. In 2008, we applied to build the Keystone XL Pipeline and today we are here to clear up some of the confusions surrounding this project.

We understand that many people are concerned about the safety of the pipeline. There is no need to worry. TransCanada is committed to building and operating the pipeline safely. From design and construction, to operation and maintenance, safety is an integral part of everything we do. We have been in the pipeline business for more than 60 years and we are a leader with one of the best pipeline safety records in the industry. The Keystone XL Pipeline will be the newest, strongest, and most advanced pipeline in operation in North America. It will use the most advanced materials and technology, and each section of the pipeline will be inspected before it leaves the specialized mills where it is being made. The real issue is steel strength, and Keystone XL will use stronger steel to help ensure public safety and protect the environment.

Also, we monitor our pipeline system through a centralized high-tech center 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We use satellite technology that sends data every five seconds from 16,000 data points to our monitoring center. If a drop in pressure is detected, we can isolate any section of our pipeline by remotely closing any of the hundreds of valves on the system within minutes. Since the pipeline is four feet below the ground, we can begin repairs immediately and effectively. Pipelines are the safest and the most reliable, economical, and environmentally favorable way to transport oil. The chance of a significant spill is remote, yet TransCanada is ready to respond immediately to limit volume and impacts.

At TransCanada, environmental responsibility is more than just talk. TransCanada is devoted to minimizing the environmental impact of the Keystone XL Pipeline along its proposed route. In all cases, great care and planning will be taken to avoid impacts on the environment. We make a special effort to protect rare or endangered species and significant water sources.

Not only do we respect the environments in which we operate, we also respect the local cultures. We have an Aboriginal and Native American Relations Policy that is guided by principles of trust, respect, and responsibility. We work together with Aboriginal communities to find mutually acceptable solutions and benefits. Often, we provide opportunities for Aboriginal businesses to participate in both the construction of new facilities and the ongoing maintenance of existing facilities.

Finally, this pipeline project will have enormous economic benefits. The construction of the Keystone Gulf Coast Expansion Pipeline project will create 13,000 construction jobs and 7,000 manufacturing jobs. It will also lead to another 118,000 spin-off jobs.

We are very pleased to have support for this pipeline from ExxonMobil, one of the world's largest oil companies. You can watch their advertisement called "Oil Sands: A Resource for Energy Security and Economic Growth" at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XQOJipRIJ8>

American Petroleum Institute

We are from the American Petroleum Institute (API). We represent more than 480 oil and natural gas companies. We speak on their behalf to the public, including to Congress and the Executive Branch, state governments, and the media. Members of API are leaders of a technology-driven industry that supplies most of America's energy. Our members also contribute enormously to the U.S. economy by providing millions of jobs and delivering more than \$86 billion a day in revenue to our government.

We call on the Obama administration to do what is right for the country and approve the Keystone XL Pipeline by the end of the year and put 20,000 Americans to work. What do 20,000 American jobs look like? Imagine a tower of people literally 100,000 feet into the sky. That's how many jobs this pipeline will provide! Some of the largest trade unions in this country are in favor of this pipeline. The Teamsters, Electrical Workers, Laborers' International, Operating Engineers, and United Association unions, representing more than 3.3 million members, have called on Obama to keep his promise of creating jobs for the American people and approve this pipeline. In fact, this project is not just a pipeline, but a lifeline for thousands of blue-collar Americans who are desperate for work. Let me just remind you that unemployment among construction workers in this country stands at 16 percent, close to double the national average.

Each delay in making a decision about this pipeline stands in the way of safely moving vital energy for American consumers and the overall economy. Strengthening our energy partnership with Canada is a critical step in reducing America's reliance on oil from less friendly sources and allowing us to control our energy future. In fact, a recent poll found that nearly 80 percent of Americans favor more oil from Canada, already our No. 1 supplier of foreign oil.

Let's face the facts. The Canadian oil sands are being developed. Oil will be a part of our energy equation for the foreseeable future and we have the opportunity to secure the energy we will need from a friendly and reliable trading partner—Canada. More importantly, as Canada's minister of the environment recently stated, tar sands oil is a source of ethical oil. Not like Saudi Arabia, from where we purchased 400 million barrels of oil last year. Why should we trade with a country that does not allow its women to vote, drive, or even leave the house without a man? By buying our oil from Saudi Arabia, we fund the oppression of women. If this ethical pipeline is created, it will be a stable source of 1.4 million barrels of oil per day from our friendly neighbor to the north. Then we won't be dependent on getting our oil from Venezuela and Saudi Arabia. Canada's ethical oil will strengthen our nation's energy security.

For more on ethical oil, watch "Ethical Oil TV Ad—Saudi Arabia" at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SjZlqbDudI>

The Republican Party

As members of the Republican Party, we strongly support the construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline and we urge President Obama to back this project immediately. In fact, the Republican-controlled House recently passed a measure that would force a decision on the Keystone XL within two months.

The Keystone XL Pipeline is a shovel-ready American energy project. Right away, it will create 20,000 construction jobs and then lead indirectly to another 100,000 jobs. Obama has been taking too long to make a decision on this because he is more worried about his own job than the jobs of the American people. He is worried that the extreme environmental groups, who protested outside of the White House, won't vote him back into power if he approves the project. Extreme environmentalists and those opposed to the pipeline are flat-out wrong. Pipelines are the safest way to transport oil. And based on the several recent assessments, the safety of this pipeline will exceed all others. Most importantly, there is absolutely no proof that the use of oil and other fossil fuels causes global warming. That is ridiculous! Climate change or global warming is nothing more than an unproven theory. We need to stop wasting our time with unproven theories and start providing jobs for the American people.

Here's what Texas Representative Ted Poe has said: "To me, this is an easy choice for this administration: either they can force Americans to continue to rely on unfriendly foreign countries for our energy, like Venezuela and the Middle Eastern dictators, by depriving Americans of a reliable source of oil at a time when gas prices are around \$4, or they can work with our friends in the north to supply more than 1.4 million barrels of oil per day. Pipelines are the proven and safe, efficient source of energy. Best of all, this project creates thousands of jobs at a time when unemployment in this country is 9.2 percent.

And here's Texas Gov. Rick Perry: "Given the unrest in the Middle East, turning to Canada for a secure oil supply is logical. Keystone XL will transport crude petroleum from the sands of northwest Canada, providing a safer and more reliable supply of oil than the product currently imported from unstable regions of the world.

"The issue of global warming has been politicized. I think that there are a substantial number of scientists who have manipulated data so that they will have dollars rolling into their projects. And I think we're seeing it almost weekly or even daily, scientists who are coming forward and questioning the original idea that man-made global warming is what is causing the climate to change. And I don't think, from my perspective, that I want America to be engaged in spending that much money on a scientific theory that has not been proven and, from my perspective, is more and more being put into question."

Here is the official position of former Massachusetts governor and presidential hopeful Mitt Romney on this project: "We are already heavily involved in Canadian production and Mexico has recently begun reaching out to foreign partners. As president, Mitt Romney will seek to promote those relationships. In addition to ensuring rapid progress on the Keystone XL Pipeline, a Romney administration will pave the way for the construction of additional pipelines that can accommodate the expected growth in Canadian supply of oil and natural gas in the coming years."

Environmental Activists

We are completely opposed to the construction of TransCanada's Keystone XL Pipeline. In fact, we are among the 2,000 environmental activists from across the continent who protested its construction outside the White House for two weeks in August 2011. We were also among the 10,000 people who circled the White House recently to pressure Obama to reject this project.

We keep hearing from members of the Obama administration that they would like to do more to help the environment but they are always being stopped by the Republicans. Well, here is Mr. Obama's chance to do what he says he wants to do! The thing about the Keystone XL Pipeline is that because it comes from Canada, which is another country, the approval process doesn't have to go through Congress. Because it is a foreign project, it has to go through the State Department. The State Department has to decide whether this pipeline is in the national interest of the United States and then Mr. Obama has to sign off on it. The president has the final word. So in a sense we have really called Mr. Obama's bluff. We're saying, "OK, we are taking you at your word. You say that you want to do something about climate change but Congress won't let you, now you can't hide behind Congress. This one is on you. You have all of the power to stop this thing."

We are opposed to the pipeline because we know the devastating impacts it will have. TransCanada's Keystone XL Pipeline would cross the Yellowstone River, as well as the Ogallala Aquifer, the largest freshwater aquifer in the United States. It is an environmental disaster waiting to happen. Our friends at Bold Nebraska have specific examples about the impact on the state of Nebraska.

Not only are we opposed to the pipeline, we are also opposed to mining the tar sands. The tar sands industrial project is completely unsustainable and immoral. It is destroying the environment and the health of the First Nations Peoples on whose land it is located in northern Alberta, Canada. We need to decrease the impact of the tar sands, not increase it. But the Keystone XL Pipeline would massively increase the capacity of the tar sands.

Twenty of the world's top climate scientists are against this project. According to NASA climate scientist James Hansen, this pipeline would be "game over for the planet" because its effects would be so extreme. We all know that the safe amount of carbon in the atmosphere is 350 ppm (parts per million) but currently we are at 390 ppm. We must do all we can to reduce carbon emissions, not increase them.

We are not just against the tar sands because it is oil, but because of the particular kind of oil that it is. Tar sands are a mixture of sand, clay, and heavy crude oil. Getting the oil out of that mixture is an incredibly energy-intensive process. The oil is very hard to extract from the tar sands and it emits three times as much greenhouse gases to produce a barrel of oil from the tar sands as it does to produce a barrel of regular Canadian crude. Also, because of the tar sands, now the largest industrial project on earth, Canada's CO₂ emissions have gone up by 30 percent. At a time when we should all be cutting our emissions, Canada's emissions have gone up by 30 percent. Canada should be ashamed.

The American Petroleum Institute likes to talk about jobs and the unions that are in favor of the pipeline. But what about the unions, representing more than 4.9 million members, that are opposed to the pipeline? The Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the United Auto Workers, United Steelworkers, and the Communications Workers of America have called on Obama to reject this pipeline because they know that the jobs will not be sustainable. As our ally, Joe Uehlein at the Labor Network for Sustainability has said: "Climate change demands that we rethink everything. We need to be looking at jobs through a carbon lens. We can fix the economy

and climate change . . . but not by supporting 20th-century energy projects.” If this government is truly serious about creating jobs and reducing climate change, then it should invest in clean energy. This means producing hybrid cars, renewable energy, and environmentally sustainable biofuels. This is the energy of the future and America should take the lead in this area—as President Obama promised we would do when he ran for president.

Tar sands oil threatens our air, water, land, and economy, and will increase already dangerously high greenhouse gas emissions. Tar sands oil has no place in a clean energy economy. It’s time for us to get off fossil fuels. Fossil fuels are over. We must show President Obama that he has the support to stand up against the gas, oil, and coal industry and deny these permits to the tar sands pipeline.

Indigenous Environmental Network

We represent an organization called the Indigenous Environmental Network, a group that works to protect the environment and build sustainable indigenous communities. We, indigenous peoples (known as First Nations Peoples in Canada), have lived for thousands of years in harmony with nature. We are taking the lead to stop the largest industrial project on Mother Earth: the tar sands.

We are completely opposed to mining the tar sands for oil and to the Keystone XL Pipeline. We know firsthand the devastating effects of the tar sands on the lives of indigenous peoples in northern Alberta and we know the impact this will have on the environment and the lives of the peoples in the communities where the pipeline will pass. In northern Alberta, our cultural heritage, ecosystems, and health are all being sacrificed for oil money. If you were to see with your own eyes the incredible destruction caused by the tar sands, you would understand how blind greed is destroying our land, water, and way of life.

When talking about the tar sands, TransCanada, the oil companies, and even the Canadian government say that “everything is fine.” They spend millions of dollars on advertisements and campaigns promising jobs, environmental cleanup, and carbon offset markets to create the illusion of an “ethical, clean oil sands” industry. Don’t believe a word they say. Everything is not fine. Our previously beautiful and pristine land has been contaminated. Now in northern Alberta, you find ecosystems that have been completely destroyed because of deforestation, water so polluted with toxins that fish have tumors and birds that land in contaminated ponds die instantly. Tar sands extraction is also killing off the caribou. Today, just 175 to 275 caribou remain. And if things do not change, the total population is expected to be fewer than 50 by 2025 and extinct in the region by 2040.

In the First Nations communities surrounding the tar sands, there are dangerously high rates of cancer. In 2008, a study was conducted to learn about the rates of cancer in the community of Fort Chipewyan, which is downstream from the tar sands. The study found that cancer rates had increased 30 percent between 1995 and 2006. John O’Connor, the doctor for this town, found five cases of a rare type of cancer in this town of only 1,200 people. The normal incidence for this rare cancer is no more than one case per 100,000 people. O’Connor has also found disturbing rates of leukemia, lymphoma, lupus, colon cancer, and Graves’ disease in the people of Fort Chipewyan. People are dying in Canada because of tar sands oil. There is no such thing as ethical oil.

Bold Nebraska

We are members of a group called Bold Nebraska. We are people from all walks of life and all political parties, including farmers, ranchers, conservatives, liberals, even members of the Tea Party, who oppose the construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline. We are here today to make our concerns known and we recently took part in the demonstrations outside of the White House.

We are opposed to this pipeline not only because transporting oil is dangerous, but also because tar sands oil is even worse. In fact, tar sands oil is three times more corrosive than other oil because it has to be mixed with so many different chemicals just to get it through the pipeline. We especially do not want a pipeline crossing through the Nebraska Sand Hills or the Ogallala Aquifer. The Nebraska Sand Hills are a fragile ecosystem. They're literally made of sand, where a lot of our cattle are raised. The Ogallala Aquifer is one of the largest sources of freshwater in the world. It supplies drinking water to millions of people who live in the Midwest and provides 30 percent of this nation's groundwater used for irrigation. To have a pipeline cross that fragile ecosystem is mind-boggling. This pipeline would also kick landowners like Randy and Amy, whose families have raised cattle and farmed for generations, off their land.

TransCanada, you are lying when you say that your Keystone pipelines are the safest on the continent. What about the 12 spills that have occurred on your Keystone I pipeline since it began operation in June 2010? That pipeline of yours suffered more spills than any other first-year pipeline in the USA. You can talk all you want about your strong steel and your 24-hour pipeline monitoring system; your 12 spills in 12 months speaks loud and clear.

Supporters of this project say that the pipeline will create jobs. But the truth is that the type of jobs that it will create will not be permanent and they will be not be well-paid. If we look at TransCanada's previous record, when a pipeline was built in South Dakota, only 11 percent of the jobs went to locals and these were just temporary and low-paying. Also, we should be suspicious about how many jobs will be created. The recent figure quoted by TransCanada and the American Petroleum Institute is 20,000. Last week, Fox News reported that it would create 118,000 jobs. One news outlet said it might create up to a million jobs. Get your facts straight. The number seems to change every day.

But the main reason we are here today is to send a message to Mr. Obama. President Obama, you promised us on the campaign trail that when you got elected, you were going to put policies in place to heal the planet. Allowing this pipeline to cross the Sand Hills and the Ogallala Aquifer, our cleanest source of water, which we use for drinking and agriculture (Nebraska's main economic activity), will not heal the planet. It will do just the opposite.

We, as citizens of this country, have the right to control and protect our own lands. That is what democracy is—the right to make the decisions that affect our lives. We have the right to clean water, clean air, and safe places to raise our children. The Keystone XL Pipeline is not acceptable. So Nebraskans, across party lines, across the state, are standing up and saying, “No pipeline.”

Links to Documents, Photos, and Video Clips related to the Alberta Tar Sands and the Keystone XL Pipeline

1. Invitation Letter to Protest the Keystone XL Pipeline

<http://www.yesmagazine.org/planet/the-people-v-the-pipeline-time-to-join-in>

2. National Geographic Photo Essay of the Tar Sands

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2009/03/canadian-oil-sands/essick-photography>

3. Map of the Proposed Keystone XL Pipeline

http://www.transcanada.com/keystone_pipeline_map.html

4. ExxonMobil Tar Sands Commercial

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XQOJipRIJ8>

5. Ethical Oil Commercial

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SjZlqbDudI>

6. Canada's Oil Sands: Come See for Yourself

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHGD1N-Vix4&feature=related>

7. Stop the Keystone XL Dirty Sands Pipeline by the National Wildlife Federation Action Fund

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNpQ2nTUYkU&feature=related>

8. A Debate between American Petroleum Institute and Bold Nebraska: Should the U.S. Approve TransCanada's Massive Keystone XL Tar Sands Oil Pipeline?

http://www.democracynow.org/2011/8/19/a_debate_should_the_us_approve

9. Clip of Over 160 Arrested in Ongoing Civil Disobedience Against Keystone XL Tar Sands Oil Pipeline and Interview with Bill McKibben of 350.org

http://www.democracynow.org/2011/8/23/over_160_arrested_in_ongoing_civil

10. Indigenous Environmental Network at the Protests in Washington

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxmTKgrXF2g&feature=related>

11. Naomi Klein speaking on Climate Change and the Tar Sands

Part 1: about Occupy Wall Street and introducing Naomi Klein

<http://www.conversationswithgreatminds.com/video/conversations-great-minds-naomi-klein-occupy-wall-street-p1>

Part 2: about the XL Pipeline and Climate Change

<http://www.conversationswithgreatminds.com/video/conversations-great-minds-naomi-klein-occupy-wall-street-p2>

12. Indigenous Activists from Canada Protest Tar Sands Oil at Durban Climate Change Summit

http://www.democracynow.org/2011/12/6/indigenous_activists_from_canada_protest_tar

13. Naomi Klein on Environmental Victory: Obama Delays Keystone XL Oil Pipeline Decision Until 2013

http://www.democracynow.org/2011/11/11/naomi_klein_obama_delays_keystone_xl

14. Obama Rejects Keystone XL Pipeline under GOP Deadline, but Opponents Prepare for Long-Term Fight: Interviews with Bill McKibben of 350.org and Jane Kleeb of Bold Nebraska

http://www.democracynow.org/2012/1/19/obama_rejects_keystone_xl_pipeline_under