

Keystone XL pipeline a threat to South Carolina coastal tourism

To the Editor:

Secretary of State John Kerry needs to talk with U.S. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell. Better yet, he should come see the South Carolina coast firsthand.

Last year, Jewell toured Bulls Island and witnessed how only a 1-foot rise in sea level over the last century has turned a vibrant hardwood island into a “boneyard beach.” The same disaster situation from even faster-rising seas is facing South Carolina’s vibrant tourism economy, from Cherry Grove at the North to Beaufort in the South.

Only it won’t be just lost beaches and trees. Whole business and residential communities are in danger, and not just if the maximum prediction of a 6-foot rise by the end of the century is reached. Even a 2- to 3-foot rise will inundate many commercial areas and residential communities and destroy vital infrastructure. And this means we won’t be waiting until the end of the century to see our small-business coastal tourism economy to start disappearing. It might be, as some scientists predict, only 30 to 40 years.

The secretary of state needs to know that our contacts with small businesses along our coast have uncovered strong support for trying to stop the seas from rising by eliminating the cause—carbon pollution-induced climate change. This support mirrors national small-business polling by the American Sustainable Business Council, which finds majority, bipartisan support for transitioning to a clean energy economy.

Kerry needs to hear that because we are at the end of the public comment period on the State Department’s environmental impact study on the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline. He will soon make a recommendation to President Obama on whether Keystone XL is of such national interest that it should be given a green light.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and some

other business organizations believe the pipeline is important. They talk about jobs, even though the State Department report acknowledges that very few jobs — 50 long-term and fewer than 2,000 short-term — will be created by the project. They talk about energy independence, even though the report recognizes that most of the processed oil will be exported to other countries. They talk about pipeline safety, even though the report indicates that the type of crude being transported increases the risks

to water bodies along the proposed pipeline.

However, what is most troubling to South Carolina small business is not the bogus myths of the Keystone XL’s benefits. It is the real threat to our coastal tourism economy that putting more carbon into the atmosphere poses.

The State Department’s report concludes that the Canadian tar sands are 17 percent more carbon-laden than crude oil processed in the United States in 2005. Burning this dirtier fuel would clearly exacerbate climate change resulting in higher sea levels. Even worse, Keystone XL would enable the development of even more tar-sand production by allowing for a relatively inexpensive mode of transporting the crude from Canada to our Gulf. Not only would allowing Keystone XL to move forward aim the gun at our coastal economy, it would help load the chamber with more rounds.

Secretary of State Kerry has a history of being on the correct side of carbon pollution and climate change. My organization, against most other business interests, supported him when he co-authored a 2009 opinion editorial with Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., that said, “First, we agree that climate change is real and threatens our economy and national security. That is why we are advocating aggressive reductions in our emissions of carbon gases that cause



climate change.”

Permitting the Keystone XL pipeline would contradict everything Secretary of State Kerry has proclaimed his position to be. If climate change is real and threatens our economy and national security, then Keystone XL represents a threat to our national interests. It is unquestionably a threat to South Carolina’s economic interests.

Frank Knapp Jr.
President and CEO
South Carolina Small
Business Chamber
Columbia, SC