

**Fort Myers (FL) News-Press**

**01/22/2015**

***"Keystone XL pipeline puts too much at risk"***

**Audience: 70,336**

**Source Website: [www.news-press.com](http://www.news-press.com)**

Media coverage of the Keystone XL pipeline is coalescing around a single narrative. It goes like this: Environmentalists oppose the pipeline because of climate change concerns, and U.S. construction companies support the pipeline because it creates jobs.

Environmentalists warn that tar sands crude oil has three times the global warming potential of conventional crude. Oil industry interests shrug and say Canadian companies will continue to extract tar sands, with or without the pipeline. Pipeline opponents then counter: Fewer than 50 permanent jobs will be needed to staff the pipeline, a few thousand temporary construction jobs to build it. But this rendering of the debate misses the larger picture.

Americans have been told for the past several years by the petroleum industry and members of Congress that Keystone is "key to America's energy independence" and will help ensure America has the energy it needs in the future. This is hogwash.

TransCanada wants to build a pipeline through the farmland and ranches of the United States in order to send its oil to refineries in the Gulf Coast for the export market. This crude is not meant to supply the U.S. market. We have a glut of oil and gas in the U.S. because of largely unregulated fracking going on in 31 states. Between our growing natural gas supply and OPEC's effort to quash the U.S. energy boom, gas prices are so low that American producers may slow their drilling. The Keystone pipeline will not reduce the cost of gasoline or home heating oil for American consumers.

What a TransCanada pipeline will do is put a major underground water supply at risk. Keystone XL would be built directly above the Ogallala Aquifer, located beneath most of Nebraska and extending to seven other states. The Ogallala is a shallow aquifer, meaning a pipeline spill could easily pollute this drinking water source for 2 million Americans.

The pipeline would cross thousands of acres of farmland in the Great Plains; a spill could make this land unusable for years. In 2013, an oil pipeline spilled 840,000 gallons of crude near Tioga, North Dakota, and crews are still working to clean it up. Keystone I, which runs from Canada through Illinois, had 14 reported leaks during its first year of operation.

TransCanada has been criticized for failing to comply with Canadian safety regulations, and the company does not intend to use the latest safety technology to detect spills along the Keystone XL route. With the pipeline traveling through miles of grassland, leaks could go undetected and unaddressed until water and soil are irreparably damaged. In Texas, where pipeline construction has already begun, landowners have reported issues to the U.S. Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration and been told that there are not enough inspectors to investigate their claims.

An additional concern is the impact on the Gulf. The pipeline would carry Canadian crude to refineries on the U.S. Gulf Coast, to communities such as Port Arthur, Texas, where residents are already burdened with disproportionately high levels of pollution. These communities would bear the brunt of increased emissions from refining dirty tar sands crude and the Gulf Coast -- still not recovered from the 2010 BP oil spill -- would take on the risk of further spills from increased export traffic.

The Keystone decision is being reviewed by the State Department because it is a critical issue for the nation. This project asks American farmers, ranchers and residents in the path of the pipeline and those in port communities along the Gulf Coast to put crucial parts of our nation's water supply,

grasslands and habitats at risk so that Canadian oil producers -- and some U.S. oil refineries -- can benefit. This is a bad deal.

We can find alternative energy sources, but American water supplies are precious and under pressure. Just ask agriculturalists and consumers in the West. Instead of responding to the narrow interests of a few oil companies, we need our elected officials to steward the natural resources that have allowed our country to prosper and feed the world.

McFate is the president and CEO of the Center for Effective Government in Washington, D.C.

caption text

***Katherine McFate*** (Photo: Special to news-press.com)

Copyright 2015 Fort Myers News-Press

Audience provided by Nielsen/NetRatings

***Highlights: Media coverage of the Keystone XL pipeli..., Katherine McFate***