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Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on “Expediting the Keystone XL Pipeline: Energy Security and Jobs”
Subcommittee on Energy and Power
December 2, 2011

Today’s hearing focuses on the proposed Keystone XL pipeline -- a \$7 billion, 2,000-mile pipeline that would carry a sludge made from Canadian tar sands through the middle of America.

My greatest concern is that Keystone XL would make us more reliant on the dirtiest source of fuel currently available. On a life-cycle basis, tar sands emit far more carbon pollution than conventional oil – almost 40% more by some estimates. That’s because it takes huge amounts of energy to take something the consistency of tar – which they mine – and turn it into synthetic oil. We should be reducing our oil dependence and using cleaner fuels. But Keystone is a big step in the opposite direction.

By moving tar sands oil to Gulf Coast refineries, the Keystone XL pipeline would open world markets to tar sands oil. The pipeline would remove existing constraints on tar sands production, dramatically increasing carbon pollution for decades. It would be the equivalent to building five large coal-fired power plants.

Last month, the International Energy Agency issued its authoritative World Energy Outlook for 2011. IEA found that, in just five years, business-as-usual investment in energy infrastructure will lock in enough carbon pollution to commit the world to potentially devastating warming of 11 degrees Fahrenheit or more. The IEA’s Chief Economist called such an outcome “a catastrophe for all of us.”

We face a choice: business as usual and climate catastrophe ... or making the necessary changes in our energy infrastructure to mitigate the damage. Keystone XL is the wrong choice.

Supporters of this project make a number of arguments that just don’t stand up to scrutiny.

They say this pipeline will enhance energy security for the U.S. But the Department of Energy found that we will have excess pipeline capacity from Canada for the next decade or more, even without Keystone XL. And there is nothing to stop Gulf Coast refineries from simply exporting the refined product. That doesn't improve our energy security.

The Obama Administration's fuel economy standards will do far more to boost our energy security by saving 1.8 billion barrels of oil while saving consumers money at the pump.

Supporters also say if we don't build Keystone XL, the oil will go west to Asia. That is far from certain. There are legal and political hurdles for a large new pipeline to Canada's west coast, including unified opposition from more than 70 First Nations with aboriginal land and water rights in the pipeline route. A de facto tanker ban also exists off the British Columbia coast. In June, Alberta's Energy Minister said that absent new pipelines, "our greatest risk in Alberta is that by 2020 we will be landlocked."

One argument we will hear today is legitimate. The project would produce several thousand short-term construction jobs. And people in this country need jobs, particularly in the hard hit construction industry. But with this project, we would be paying a very high price over a very long time, for some short-term benefits.

Instead, we should be focusing on good, clean energy jobs that are going to last. Our future depends on developing clean energy. There will be \$38 trillion invested in new energy infrastructure over the next 20 years. Our economic growth and our national security will be determined by whether we succeed in building these new industries.

I support the Administration's decision to take some additional time to do a thorough evaluation of the climate and other environmental impacts of the proposed pipeline. This is a decision that we need to get right.

It's imperative that we start to move to a clean energy economy . . . now. Keystone XL would take us in the opposite direction. It would double our reliance on the dirtiest source of oil available, drive a significant increase in carbon pollution, and lock this in for a century. There are better ways to create better, lasting jobs.