



KANSAS INTERFAITH POWER & LIGHT

Testimony Of Rabbi Moti Rieber in Opposition to HSR 5014

“Urging approval of the Presidential Permit application allowing the construction and operation of the TransCanada Keystone XL Pipeline.”

Kansas House Energy & Environment Committee

Thursday, March 14, 2013

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. My name is Rabbi Moti Rieber, and I am Director of Kansas Interfaith Power & Light, the statewide chapter of a national organization that has as its mission to “engage faith communities in environmental stewardship and sustainable practices through the promotion of energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy.” Our members see their support for a clean energy future as a core element of their religious identity – their implementation of the God’s command in the Book of Genesis that we human beings are to care for Creation.

As a Kansan, and as a person of faith, I wish to express my opposition to HSR 5014, and to the Keystone XL pipeline that it encourages. During every step of the process, from mining to processing to piping to refining and export, the Keystone XL project is an environmental disaster, a direct threat to Kansas’ natural beauty, to our water and food supply, to the possibility of a clean energy future, and most importantly, to the stability of the world’s climate.

The term “oil sands” or “tar sands” oil refers to thick oil called bitumen that is mixed in with sand, clay, and water. Intensive energy is required to process the thick bitumen into crude oil that can be piped. Oil sands operations currently use about 0.6 billion cubic feet of natural gas a day - enough natural gas in a day to heat 3 million homes. By 2015 that level could rise to 2 billion cubic feet a day.

In addition to the large energy use to make the oil sands able to be transported, oil sands extraction uses significant amounts of water (2-4.5 barrels per barrel of oil produced). In place of virgin forests are permanent waste water dumps and mine pits so massive they are visible from outer space.

The proposed pipeline would run the vertical length of the country, approximately 2000 miles from Canada to the petroleum refineries on the Gulf coast in Texas. Along this route, farming, ranching, and tourism are major sources of employment - approximately 571,000 workers are directly employed in the agricultural sector in the states along the Keystone XL corridor. The threat to the water supply, particularly wells, is one reason farmers and ranchers in Nebraska have been so strong in their opposition to the pipeline project.

Leaks and spills are common from such pipelines. In just the very first year of operation, the existing leg of the pipeline has had [one significant spill and 11 smaller spills](#). A study by the University in Nebraska found there was a likelihood of a “91 significant spills” of more than 50 barrels, or 2,100 gallons, of crude oil over a 50-year lifespan. Despite TransCanada’s promises, the recent record of their Keystone I pipeline shows that their pipelines leak, and when this one does, it will be Kansas’ local property owners, wildlife and environment that will bear the burden.

The benefits of the pipeline have consistently been exaggerated by its proponents. The State Department, based on TransCanada’s own numbers, shows that at most 3,900 construction jobs will be created in building the pipeline, with only 10 percent of the total workforce hired locally. Only 35 permanent jobs will be created by the pipeline. And because the pipeline is already in place in Kansas, we will not even see the benefit of these few jobs.

The pipeline will not bring energy security to America, as TransCanada has confirmed that the purpose of Keystone

XL is to enable tar sands to be exported as diesel from the Gulf to take advantage of higher international market prices. In fact, it can fairly be said that the oil will go to China, the profits will go to Canada, and all America will get is the shaft.

But the main reason why this project should never be built, and the reason it has become a centerpiece of protest, is its potential impact on climate change. The intensive methods necessary to extract and process this oil are themselves three to four times more greenhouse gas intensive as regular crude oil. What's worse, making transport and export more convenient will guarantee that this dirty form of oil will be fully exploited. If we hope to avoid the most devastating effects of climate disruption all over the world, including species extinctions, sea level rise, glacial melt, droughts and extreme weather events, loss of arable land, and mass population dislocation, we are going to have to choose not to exploit every potential fossil fuel resource in the world.

I know there are some members of this committee who are not sure about what to think about climate change. There are a lot of statistics and positions being thrown around from all directions. But I saw something yesterday that I think is very useful. On the blog of the conservative, Catholic journal *First Things*, the writer David T. Koyzis wrote the following,

In the absence of certainty on the issue, our political leaders must still make policies while weighing in the balance the various conflicting considerations at stake. The balance will never be perfect, of course, but in general it seems to me that, even if anthropogenic global warming is *not* occurring, we still have an obligation to pursue policies to protect our physical environment, both for the sake of future generations and in recognition of our responsibility before God for his creation. We may not be able to settle the debate, but it seems wise to err on the side of caution and of minimizing the environmental risks to our descendants.

Yet instead of dealing with this issue and moving farther and faster toward more sustainable forms of energy, we instead find new ways, like oil sands, to add to the carbon burden. America is like a drug addict who, fearing that his supply will be cut off, searches for newer and ever more dangerous ways to feed the addiction. Exploiting the tar sands will keep us hooked for another 50 years, and as the renowned NASA scientist James Hanson has put it, that will mean “game over” for our climate. That is irresponsible, it's immoral, and it must not be allowed to occur.

We should instead look for alternatives to our devastating habits. And those alternatives are available – better clean air safeguards, more robust energy efficiency and, I might add, a vibrant renewable energy sector, such as we have here in Kansas. We can and should be putting our efforts into developing these alternatives, instead of trying to undermine them and doubling down on fossil fuels.

In conclusion, an energy policy that moves the nation toward an even dirtier and more dangerous form of oil, and involves such devastation of God's Creation, represents a profound moral failure. Kansas Interfaith Power & Light urges this body to defeat HCR 5014, and also urges Secretary Kerry and President Obama to say no to environmental devastation, to say no to climate change, and to say no to the Keystone XL pipeline.

Thank you very much for your attention. I will stand for questions.