

5 Myths About Keystone XL, Debunked

Jill Fitzsimmon February 14 2013

A Washington Post editorial argued that concerns about the climate impact of the pipeline are irrelevant because "Supply would make it to demand, one way or another." [Washington Post, 1/23/13]

Fox News contributor Charles Krauthammer said it is "ridiculous" to think that "if you don't build the pipeline [the oil] will stay in the ground," adding: "Canada's not going to leave it in the ground so it's not going to have any effect on the climate." [Fox News, Special Report, 2/13/13]

A Washington Times op-ed by the Institute for Energy Research's Tom Pyle claimed that "preventing the construction of the pipeline in the United States won't stop the Canadian oil from going to other parts of the world. Rejecting the pipeline and allowing Canada to send its oil via pipeline, train and tanker to Asia actually would generate more carbon-dioxide emissions than its proposed route through the United States." [Washington Times, 2/6/13]

Washington Examiner editorial writer Sean Higgins wrote: "The environmentalists just simply don't want to develop any new carbon- based energy sources ... Never mind that Canada will develop the tar sands oil regardless of what the United States does." [Washington Examiner, 2/6/13]

FACT: Pipeline Could Spur Expanded Production Of Dirty Tar Sands Oil

CRS: Keystone XL Would Increase U.S. Emissions By The Equivalent Of Up To Four Million Cars Annually. The nonpartisan Congressional Research Service found in a survey of published literature that because tar sands oil is more carbon intensive than conventional crude oil, the Keystone XL pipeline would increase U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by the equivalent of "approximately 558,000 to 4,061,000 passenger vehicles" annually:

Canadian oil sands crudes are on average somewhat more GHG emission-intensive than the crudes they would displace in U.S. refineries, as Well-to-Wheel GHG emissions are, on average, 14%-20% higher for Canadian oil sands crude than for the weighted average of transportation fuels sold or distributed in the United States;

discounting the final consumption phase of the life-cycle assessment (which can contribute up to 70%-80% of Well-to-Wheel emissions), Well-to-Tank (i.e., "production") GHG emissions are, on average, 72%-

111% higher for Canadian oil sands crude than for the weighted average of transportation fuels sold or distributed in the United States;

compared to selected imports, Canadian oil sands crudes range from 9% to 19% more emission-intensive than Middle Eastern Sour, 5% to 13% more emission-intensive than Mexican Maya, and 2% to 18% more emission-intensive than various Venezuelan crudes, on a Well-to-Wheel basis;

the estimated effect of the proposed Keystone XL pipeline on the U.S. GHG footprint would be an increase of 3 million to 21 million metric tons of GHG emissions annually (equal to the annual GHG emissions from the combustion of fuels in approximately 588,000 to 4,061,000 passenger vehicles)

But CRS noted that the effect on global greenhouse gas emissions depends on whether the project accelerates tar sands extraction in Canada. [Congressional Research Service, 6/18/12]

Expanded Tar Sands Production Is Not Inevitable. A common argument in favor of the Keystone XL pipeline is that Canadian tar sands will be developed one way or the other, so the U.S. may as well transport that oil. But alternative pipeline routes face regulatory hurdles and strong opposition from local and environmental groups that could delay or halt the projects altogether. The proposed Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipeline, which would transport the tar sands oil to Canada's west coast, would likely face opposition from environmentalists in Canada in addition to possible legal challenges from more than 100 First Nations in Western Canada. Meanwhile, the proposal to double the capacity of the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain pipeline, which runs from Alberta to British Columbia, faces resistance from residents near the port, and is unlikely to be completed in the next decade, if at all. Thus, an analysis by the Canadian environmental think tank Pembina Institute found that Keystone XL would be a "key driver for oilsands growth," increasing production by 36 percent. [Pembina Institute, 2/24/12] [Vancouver Sun, 12/13/12] [Vancouver Observer, 11/30/12] [Pembina Institute, 1/17/13]

Industry Analysts Say Blocking Keystone XL Would Delay Expansion Of Tar Sands Production. Many industry analysts and executives have said that without Keystone XL, limited pipeline capacity would impede expanded tar sands production. For instance, The Globe and Mail reported:

If the \$7-billion (U.S.) project is not built, the energy sector faces the prospect of being "landlocked in bitumen," with no way to get mounting crude production to market. Without the massive new line, whose environmental impact has become the subject of heated debate in the U.S., existing pipelines could be constrained in as little as four years.

[...]

"Unless we get increased [market] access, like with Keystone XL, we're going to be stuck," said Ralph Glass, an economist and vice-president at AJM Petroleum Consultants in Calgary. [The Globe and Mail, 6/8/11, via Grist] [350.org, 2013]

Several Top Climate Scientists Oppose The Project. Skeptical Science noted that 18 of the country's top climate scientists oppose Keystone XL because of its potential climate impacts. Peter Gleick, a scientist who specializes in the connections between water and climate change, wrote that while the pipeline itself is "not a game changing or planet-threatening project," it is part of "a far larger picture ... of potential planetary disaster." [Skeptical Science, 2/8/13] [National Geographic's ScienceBlogs, 2/10/13]

MYTH: New Route Would Avoid Sensitive Ecosystems

Fox News contributor Juan Williams said that the threat to the Ogallala Aquifer "was a real issue," but "now they have a different route." [Fox News, Special Report With Bret Baier, 2/13/13]

In a Wall Street Journal column, the Cato Institute's Paul Knappenberger argued that "the arguments against the pipeline have all but evaporated. The route now largely bypasses the most ecologically sensitive regions." [Wall Street Journal, 1/24/13]

A Houston Chronicle editorial stated: "With the sign-off by Nebraska's governor on a new route for the pipeline that avoids environmentally sensitive areas in the Cornhusker state, the president should give the project the green light. [Houston Chronicle, 1/28/13]