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Today

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"Our country is the world – our countrymen are mankind."

L.D. BLISS, Printer

Why I oppose the Keystone XL Pipeline

This week, President Obama issued only the third veto of his presidency, rejecting a bill which would have authorized the Keystone XL pipeline. A veto is not the same thing as **denying the permit** to TransCanada, the builder of the pipeline. Denying the permit is something that the President has the authority to do, since the pipeline crosses an international border, and yet Obama hesitates to put the fatal stake through the vampire's heart. Even his veto report back to the Senate was ambiguous: "The presidential power to veto legislation is one I take seriously, but I also take seriously my responsibility to the American people. And because this act of Congress conflicts with established executive branch procedures and cuts short thorough consideration of issues that could bear on our national interest — including our security, safety, and environment — it has earned my veto." The editor of the *The Liberator Today*, writing as a Kansan, opposes the Keystone XL pipeline for the following reasons:

❑ The Keystone XL pipeline cannot be understood in a vacuum, nor be decided upon according to its own merits. The most important context is the tar sands oil which the pipeline will bring to market, and the climate change which will be exacerbated by the emission of this dirtier oil's carbon dioxide.

❑ I have seen firsthand the early effects of climate change, and the suffering of people in India, Pakistan, Nepal, and the Maldives. If I must side with the vulnerable poor on the one hand, or with (on the other side) the oil industry, the State Department, the U.S. President, members of either U.S. political party, etc.— I choose to follow my biblical convictions and side with the poor.

❑ I have exercised my responsibility as a thinking human being and have faithfully sifted through competing truth claims. I choose to throw in my lot with Dr. James Hansen and the 97% of all climatologists who have confirmed the reality and urgency of climate change.

❑ Hansen reports that the burning of known reserves in the Albertan tar sands alone can result in an additional 150 parts per million of greenhouse gases put into the atmosphere. At the resulting 550 ppm, the (known/proven) properties of CO₂ molecules would likely result in a 3°C warming above pre-industrial levels. We are having a difficult enough time dealing with our current 0.8°C warming.

❑ And so, you cannot attest to the reality and urgency of climate change, as President Obama has done, and then turn around and actively encourage the development of something like the tar sands.

❑ President George W. Bush has admitted that we are "addicted to oil." If so, then I admit that I am implicated as a junkie, and the Keystone XL pipeline is just the latest syringe. It flies in the face of wisdom that we would lock ourselves into the investment of tar sands oil rather than investing in renewable energies which will NEVER be sufficiently brought on-line unless we make the heavy investments, the tough decisions, and the correct market signals NOW.

❑ Some argue that denying the Keystone XL permit will only delay the development of the tar sands, and not prevent that development. Perhaps, but we should not underestimate the benefit of that delay and all that can be accomplished, by God's grace, with that bought time. This is an act of faith in God. But more importantly, delay-or-prevention is a utilitarian argument. My conviction, as voiced above, is that I refuse to be implicated in the harm inflicted by climate change on my neighbors. I grieve that my country and our leaders are implicated in it.

❑ I am a Kansan, and so I stand with my neighbors in Nebraska, as a steward of the Ogallala aquifer. Despite fervent assurances, pipelines leak. In fact, Keystone One (which is owned by TransCanada as a sister to Keystone XL and

already brings oil through Kansas to Galena, IL) has had two leaks in Kansas: March 16, 2011 near Seneca, and May 29, 2011 near Bendena. A pipeline leak in or near the Sand Hills of Nebraska would hurt the Ogallala aquifer at the very time Kansas State University scientists and government officials are pleading with us for its conservation.

❑ I am a Kansas landowner and was raised among the ranchers and farmers of the Flint Hills. I grieve the way that ranchers and landowners (particularly in Nebraska and Texas, but also among Native Americans in the US and Canada) have been treated by their own federal and state governments, and by a foreign corporation. "Eminent domain" has been the tactic of a bully. Every day these farmers and ranchers sacrifice for the "common good," but now they are being sacrificed for the benefit of wealthy oil companies and well-lobbied legislators.

❑ I am ready to take a stand against the general myth of "job creation." It is propaganda to think that "wealth creation" for the wealthiest CEOs greatly results in jobs for anybody outside their own circle. The whole point of a pipeline (like most LABOR-**SAVING** automation) is to **ELIMINATE JOBS**, which are simply "costs" which figure against the profits on the corporate ledger. The Keystone XL pipeline has already been built through Kansas. There are **NO OTHER** Kansas jobs in the pipeline. And once construction is completed elsewhere, there will be few if any new and lasting jobs connected to this project.

❑ Similarly "independence from foreign oil" is not the independence that we need. As addicts, we need independence from fossil fuels, period. But, additionally, there is a reason why the Keystone XL pipeline goes all the way down to Houston—because that oil is meant to enter the global market as a fungible commodity. In other words, the only way Americans will have access to that oil is if we outbid all other competitors for it. When it comes to KXL, "independence from foreign sources" is as big a myth as "job creation."

❑ I am also ready to take a stand against "extreme energy" and the deadly hubris which attends it. For a long time now we've known about the tar sands and have had the technology to extract oil from it. But the only reason why we are tackling such a dirty and costly option (i.e. with low Energy-on-Investment) is because all our easily- and cheaply-tappable sources of sweet crude have been used up. Extreme energy is also seen in the Deepwater Horizon, which was drilling a mile below the ocean's surface when it blew up and killed eleven people. It's seen in the methane-extraction process known as hydro-fracking.

❑ I am married to a wonderful Canadian woman, and I love her homeland dearly. Denying the Keystone XL permit might hurt the company TransCanada, but it won't set

the Canadian economy back an iota. A warming atmosphere knows no borders. The beautiful Athabasca River and northern boreal forest belongs to God the Creator first. And there is precedent for us asking Canada to shut down tar sands development: Canada asked the US to regulate industry in New England and the Ohio Valley in order to mitigate the acid rain which was destroying Canadian lakes and forests.

❑ The Keystone XL pipeline makes sense as a political target for climate change activists. It is tangible in a way that most calls to "Stop Global Warming" are not. It is a "get to the back of the bus/Rosa Parks" type moment. Since the State Department is the government entity which must issue the permit for TransCanada to cross our national borders, it is an occasion where President Obama can decide alone (i.e., without the paralyzed Congress), and show himself faithful (or not) to his promises made in the campaign, in his inaugural speech, and in his State of the Union addresses.

❑ Some argue that denying the Keystone XL permit will only be a "symbolic victory." Perhaps, but I am a Christian and I have invested my whole life in the power of symbols, and in the moral and spiritual realities behind them. Currently, international negotiations on climate action are stalled. Denying the KXL permit will be a symbolic reassertion of leadership, and is our best hope at restarting crucial international cooperation.

-A.O.B.

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