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STOP – Stop Tarsands Oil Pipelines * Tarsandsaction.org * Voices for Progress

October 4, 2011

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President:

We are deeply concerned about recently released emails that add to existing indications that your State Department has abdicated its responsibility to evaluate the proposed Keystone XL tar sands oil pipeline in an impartial way.

The Keystone XL pipeline would carry the world's dirtiest oil from Canada's tar sands through America's heartland to the U.S. Gulf Coast. The pipeline is dirty at both ends and dangerous in between. Tar sands oil extraction poisons the drinking water of indigenous First Nations communities, and refining tar sands oil from the Keystone XL would increase air pollution that causes health problems for low income communities and communities of color who live near the end of the pipeline, in Texas. Farmers and ranchers who live along the proposed pipeline route, which crosses the Ogallala drinking water aquifer as well as Nebraska's fragile Sand Hills, are concerned about pipeline spills, with good reason: the pipeline's smaller predecessor, the Keystone I, has spilled a dozen times in just its first year of operation, and a recent tar sands oil spill devastated communities surrounding Michigan's Kalamazoo River.

Moreover, tar sands oil produces far more climate-destabilizing pollution than conventional oil. One of the most respected climate scientists in the world, Dr. James Hansen of NASA, recently concluded that failure to keep tar sands oil in the ground could be "game over" for the climate.

These serious threats are the reasons our organizations strongly oppose construction of this pipeline -- and they are why we are so concerned about the newly released emails. The emails, first covered in the *Washington Post*, indicate that State Department employees exhibited a pro-pipeline bias at the same time they were supposed to be conducting an independent environmental review. According to the emails, State Department employees provided guidance to and coached pipeline firm TransCanada. The emails provide evidence of a cozy relationship between lead TransCanada lobbyist Paul Elliott (a former top Hillary Clinton campaign aide) and various State Department officials. And they raise concerns of a revolving door. One of the State Department officials who gave TransCanada advice, David Goldwyn, worked on behalf of oil interests prior to being hired into your administration. He has subsequently left your administration and is now again taking oil money and, in turn, publicly advocating approval of the Keystone XL.

The information contained in the emails is of particular concern given the already existing evidence that the State Department has not taken seriously its obligation to impartially evaluate the impacts that this pipeline would have on the environment. Last fall, Secretary of State Clinton said she was "inclined" to recommend that you approve a permit for the pipeline, prejudging the environmental review for which her agency was responsible. And in June, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that documents obtained via WikiLeaks indicate then-State Department employee Goldwyn "alleviated" Canadian officials' concern that pipeline approval was at risk, and that Goldwyn had provided "messaging" advice to the Canadians to help them undertake a public relations effort that could help with pipeline approval.

Mr. President, given this substantial evidence of pro-industry bias within your administration – evidence that the State Department was acting in partnership with the oil industry and Canadian government to secure pipeline approval prior to conducting an environmental review – it would be irresponsible for you to follow the State Department’s guidance as you make your determination about whether the pipeline is in the national interest.

Mr. President, when you ran for office, you inspired millions with your call to “change the way that Washington” works by curbing the influence of lobbyists and corporate cash. During your campaign you said, “I am running to tell the lobbyists in Washington that their days of setting the agenda are over.” It is not too late to live up to your promises. Reject this oil lobby influence and ignore the State Department’s biased conclusions. Consider independent experts’ analyses instead.

Mr. President, the State Department has erred, but there is still time for you to do the right thing. Reject this dirty tar sands oil pipeline.

Sincerely,

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