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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6175

BETTINA POIRIER, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR
ZAK BAIG, REPUBLICAN STAFF DIRECTOR

April 25, 2014

Dear Reject and Protect Rally Participants,

I commend all of the ranchers, farmers and indigenous leaders from throughout our nation's heartland who have come to Washington, D.C. this week. Although I cannot be with you in person, I want you to know that your presence sends a strong signal to Congress and the administration about the need to protect our communities and families from the impacts of dirty tar sands oil.

As you know, tar sands would be transported by pipeline through communities in environmentally sensitive areas in 6 states – some of which you are representing at the 'Reject and Protect' event.

You were drawn here this week to express your concern about how the Keystone XL pipeline will impact your water supplies, your ranches, and your tribal lands.

The Keystone XL pipeline poses a threat to our drinking water, in particular to the massive Ogallala Aquifer — one of the world's largest underground sources of fresh water. This aquifer provides water to farms in some of the states that are being represented at this event. It is a key source of drinking water and serves as a public water supply for many communities along the pipeline's proposed route.

If the pipeline were to leak near the aquifer, the tar sands oil could quickly seep in to the sandy soil. Communities have been told leaks are unlikely or won't happen, but recent spills tell us a different story.

In 2010, tar sands oil spilled into the Kalamazoo River in Michigan and is still not cleaned up today. We know from the Kalamazoo River spill and other spills how harmful this can be, because tar sands oil is very difficult to clean up.

In addition to impacts on our water supplies, many people have expressed other concerns. I have held events on Capitol Hill with public health professionals and community representatives to explain how people are faced with harm along each step of the toxic tar sands oil process -- from the extraction to the transport to the refining to the waste disposal.

Because of serious health concerns, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) and I wrote to Secretary of State John Kerry asking for a comprehensive health impact study on tar sands oil and how the Keystone XL pipeline will impact the health of communities across the nation. Just this week, the State Department agreed to include health issues as part of the National Interest Determination, but we still need a full health study on how tar sands and the pipeline will impact all the communities along the route.

We know the Keystone XL pipeline is not in your interest, and it is not in the national interest.
Thank you for coming to Washington, DC and making your voices heard.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Barbara Boxer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "B".

Barbara Boxer
Chairman
Senate Environment and Public Works Committee