



March 13, 2014

Hon. John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry,

On behalf of the 185,000 registered nurses of National Nurses United, we are writing to endorse the request by Senators Barbara Boxer and Sheldon Whitehouse for an immediate, comprehensive State Department study on the human health impacts of the proposed Keystone XL pipeline project.

As the State Department must make a national interest determination on whether to approve the pipeline, NNU believes that a project that places the health and safety of Americans at substantial risk cannot possibly be in our national interest.

Therefore, we call on the State Department to issue an affirmative finding, prior to any final decision on the project, that that the Keystone XL pipeline will have no adverse health impact on the U.S.

National Nurses United is the largest U.S. organization of nurses with 185,000 members in all 50 states, including those along the proposed path of the pipeline. NNU nurses now care daily for patients with health problems, including asthma, other respiratory disorders, cancer, skin diseases, and other ailments associated with environmental pollution.

Our organization has expressed our opposition to the pipeline, in particular to the health hazards already identified with tar sands oil, including tar sands extraction in Alberta, Canada, tar sands pipeline spills, and the effects of tar sands refining.

Tar Sands Health Hazards

In Alberta's Athabasca region, researchers have linked tar sands pollutants to carcinogens, elevated rates of leukemia and other cancers of the lymph and blood-forming systems. Water bodies within the watershed adjacent to tar sands production have been found to be contaminated with chemicals linked to cancer, genetic damage, birth defects, and organ damage, according to a National Academy of Sciences 2012 study.

Tar sands pipeline spills are a significant concern. The 2010 Kalamazoo River spill in Michigan – the effects of which are still being felt by that community – resulted in inhalation of benzene and other chemicals and more than 150 cases of illness. Michigan's Department of Public Health identified cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, neurological, ocular, dermal and

respiratory impacts. Similarly, following a 2013 spill near Mayflower, AR residents reported persistent coughs, headaches, nausea, and respiratory problems for months afterwards.

Refining raw bitumen from the tar sands is also likely to have a negative impact on health. Tar sands contains up to 11 times more sulfur than conventional crude oil with high levels of sulfur compounds linked to serious ailments of the nervous and respiratory systems. Residents of South East Texas, particularly refinery towns like Port Arthur and Houston, already live in known 'cancer zones.' Refining raw bitumen from the tar sands threatens to make a bad situation worse.

Further, the petroleum coke byproduct of tar sands refining dumped in large "petcoke" piles contains high concentrations of mercury, lead, arsenic, chromium, vanadium, and nickel. Black dust clouds from petcoke piles in Detroit and Chicago have led to neighborhood evacuations amidst concerns about acculamation in homes and areas where children play. The EPA has said the particulate matter in the dust contributes to such health effects as heart attacks, decreased lung function, asthma and premature death.

Climate Change and Health

NNU is also concerned about the long term contribution that tar sands oil and the Keystone pipeline will make to the global rise on greenhouse gas emissions and the climate crisis.

In its Fourth Assessment Review (2007), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has made a direct connection between global warming and climate instability to a wide range of negative health outcomes.

Higher air temperatures can increase bacteria-related food poisoning, such as salmonella, and animal-borne diseases such as West Nile virus. Ground level ozone contaminants can damage lung tissue, reduce lung function, and increase respiratory ailments. Pediatricians have said they are already witnessing a rise in vector-borne diseases including diarrhea, cholera, gastroenteritis, typhoid, and hepatitis due to environmental factors and the effects of climate change.

For several years NNU has been dispatching teams of RN volunteers to provide disaster relief in response to weather disasters, such as Hurricanes Sandy and Katrina, and most recently Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, all of which many experts believe are fueled by climate change. Our members have provided care for thousands of patients who have suffered serious injuries as well as the loss of family members, their homes, and their livelihoods.

We need a change of course.

NNU concurs with Senators Boxer and Whitehouse that what is known today about the health hazards associated with the expansion of the tar sands could well be just a sampling of a much larger set of significant risks to human health. NNU believes that the health consequences of Keystone XL have been substantially ignored in State Department's FEIS, and needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Nurses and our families are also affected by environmental pollution, and the increased harm associated with Keystone XL, greater tar sands operations, and the climate crisis. It is for our patients, our members, our families, and our communities, that we speak out, and urge you order an immediate health impact study and not authorize a pipeline that will harm our planet and our health.

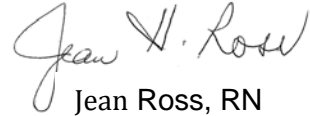
Sincerely,



Deborah Burger, RN



Karen Higgins, RN



Jean Ross, RN

Council of Presidents
National Nurses United