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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write regarding the Keystone XL pipeline and my recent trip to Alberta to view development of the oil sands first-hand.

Five years ago today, TransCanada first submitted their application for the Keystone XL pipeline. As you are aware, this pipeline will bring significant benefits to my state of North Dakota and thousands of jobs to families across our country. Earlier this year, the State Department Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement found that the pipeline would cause minimal environmental impacts and that its construction would not have a significant impact on greenhouse gas emissions. Mr. President, we have all heard critics of the pipeline raise concerns about further linking our energy future to the oil sands. I, like you, care deeply about North American energy security and sustainability, that is why I decided to go and get a better personal understanding of the benefits and challenges associated with this immense resource.

In August, I visited Alberta to tour the oil sands and meet with various stakeholders in the extraction, production, and transportation industries. This included a tour and briefing on TransCanada's state of the art pipeline control room which constantly monitors their extensive pipeline system, and will be the command center for operations and monitoring of the Keystone XL pipeline. I also met with the province's leading environmental organization, the Pembina Institute, which consistently advocates for environmental performance improvements in the oil sands region and beyond.

What stood out to me during my meetings and conversations is the fact that in Alberta, a province whose wealth depends on the energy sector, the climate change science debate was settled years ago. Large emitters, including oil sands companies, have operated under greenhouse gas regulations for more than five years and the regulatory system is driving significant investments in technologies that reduce emissions.

At one oil sands site I visited, I saw tailings ponds and open mines that would look familiar to anyone who has visited a mine in the United States. But I also saw the remediated forest and wildlife on a site that was once a Suncor tailings pond and learned that 85 percent of the water used during mining is being recycled, with help from GE, just one of over a thousand US

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companies supplying the region. While the pictures we are shown here in the United States consistently portray this surface mining activity, it is important to remember that only 20 percent of the oil sands are accessible using surface mining and the bulk of extraction and production takes place on pads (“in situ”) that look no different than those we have in North Dakota.

I also visited one of the new in situ operators, MEG Energy. The centerpiece of their operations was not an oil mine or well, but a state of the art natural gas combined cycle power plant that enables oil production that is less CO₂-intensive than the average barrel produced in the United States. The second largest feature was a water treatment facility, capturing and reusing all the water from the process. With multiple directional wells on a single pad, I could walk the entire site in a few minutes.

Finally, I met with Premier Alison Redford who shares your concern for the environment and has committed billions of dollars to the reduction of emissions through CCS, renewables and other technologies. For a province of less than 4 million people, these are significant investments that represent a strong commitment to curbing emissions. The Premier stated that more work is required to improve environmental performance in the oil sands and she is taking significant steps to deliver stronger environmental management as production increases. She also expressed a willingness to work with U.S. partners to address common challenges such as climate change and emissions reductions.

This leads me to your July comments regarding GHGs and the Keystone XL Pipeline. Those I met in Canada are the first to acknowledge that there is more to do in the area of greenhouse gas mitigation. But you have said the same is true of the United States. This is a shared challenge that calls for shared effort and better alignment of goals between the U.S. and Canada. Setting aside the significant national security and economic benefits of the pipeline, the environmental interests of the United States are best served when we choose partners that are already working to achieve better outcomes. This is especially true when those partners operate within a transparent and democratic system where they are accountable for their performance.

To my knowledge, no senior member of the Administration has visited the oil sands. Based on my experience, and given that the Administration has taken the position that what is going on in the oil sands is relevant to determining the national interest of the United States, I would encourage you and key members of your Administration to travel to Alberta to see the oil sands and meet with the key stakeholders and government officials. I think you will find, like I did, that seeing the development first-hand clarifies the issues and allows you to see the opportunities available through greater partnership with our Canadian allies.

In keeping with this theme of working with our closest allies on a path towards North American energy security and energy independence, I have invited Premier Redford to Washington this fall to meet with lawmakers. I strongly encourage you and members of your administration to take the time to meet with her while she is in Washington, in order to fully understand Alberta’s

views on oil sands development, the Keystone XL pipeline, and the province's successes and ongoing efforts to address climate change.

The fundamental reality is that this oil will move. By rail or other means, much of this oil will move to U.S. refineries in the same way that vast quantities are already moving into Midwestern refineries around Chicago. The time is now, Mr. President, to stop moving the goal posts on what is required for this project to be approved, and recognize that it is in our national interest to approve the Keystone XL pipeline.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Heidi Heitkamp". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "H".

Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senator