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EDITORIAL

Say No to the Keystone XL

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Unless good sense intervenes, it looks increasingly likely that the State Department will approve the Keystone XL pipeline, which would carry a coarse, acidic crude oil from northern Alberta in Canada to refineries on the Gulf Coast of Texas. That would be a mistake.

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North Dakota and Kansas. That is one reason why Dave Heineman, Nebraska's Republican governor, has asked that the new pipeline be rerouted. He fears a spill could pollute the Ogallala Aquifer, a crucial water source beneath the Great Plains.

Unfortunately, the State Department appears to be more persuaded by proponents who claim that the pipeline will help reduce America's dependence on oil from politically troubled sources in the Middle East. We are skeptical about that, too.

In August, the State Department, which has authority because the pipeline crosses an international boundary, released its final environmental impact statement on the project. It found that the Keystone XL would have "no significant impact" on land and water resources along its route. We, and many others, are skeptical.

An existing pipeline carrying tar sands oil — owned by TransCanada, the Keystone XL's operator — was forced to shut down for repairs after springing two leaks last May in

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What pipeline advocates — including big-oil lobbyists and House Republicans who have tried to force an early, favorable decision — fail to mention is that much of the tar sands oil that would be refined on the Gulf Coast is destined for export. Six companies have already contracted for three-quarters of the oil. Five are foreign, and the business model of the one American company — Valero — is geared toward export.

The report also fails to acknowledge that while greenhouse gas emissions caused by tar sands production have declined over the last two decades, the extraction and production of tar sands oil still causes far more emissions than conventional crude.

We have considerable sympathy for one argument: that construction of the pipeline would bring jobs at a time of great economic uncertainty. TransCanada has said the 2,000-mile line would create 20,000 jobs in the United States. The State Department concludes that the real number may be closer to 6,000 jobs.

Whichever estimate is right, it should be clear, from many studies, that the best hope for long-term job creation will come from the development of renewable and alternative energy sources. Some of Keystone's most vocal supporters are determined to slash government support for new companies developing clean-energy technologies.

Adding it all up, we do not think that the benefit from Keystone XL outweighs the certain damages and potential risks: the stripping of the Canadian boreal forest, the further carbon-loading of the atmosphere, and the threat to the Midwest's water supplies.

There is also the larger question of whether this country should keep conducting business as usual — that is, succumbing to the status quo of politics and big oil — or whether it will seriously grapple with the reality of climate change. We again urge Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton to say no to the Keystone XL.

A version of this editorial appeared in print on October 3, 2011, on page A24 of the New York edition with the headline: Say No to the Keystone XL: There are better ways to create jobs, without endangering the environment.

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