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Andrew Cash, M.P.
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
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Re: Northern Gateway and Keystone XL pipelines

Mr. Cash,

As one of your constituents, I am writing to share my intense concern about the proposed Keystone XL and Northern Gateway pipelines. The Keystone XL pipeline is designed to carry oil sands products through the United States to the Gulf Coast, while the Northern Gateway pipeline is intended to transport similar products to Kitimat, B.C. for export. Both pipelines are a very bad idea. In each case, the arguments in favour of building the pipeline focus on a particular set of financial benefits that would arise to certain individuals and groups within Canada. What these arguments ignore is the damage both pipelines will do to people all over the world today, as well as in future generations. It is unethical for us to impose risk and suffering on future generations all over the world, just so that we can temporarily enrich ourselves with oil money.

The Earth is warming because of the greenhouse gases humanity is adding to the atmosphere. Most of these gases come from the burning of fossil fuels. Humanity has already raised the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide from about 280 parts per million (ppm) before the Industrial Revolution to around 392 parts per million now. In order to avoid severe and dangerous climate change, it is necessary for humanity to stabilize the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and to do so before enough

accumulates to cause a severe effect. Stabilization at a safe level requires global emissions of greenhouse gas pollution to be cut aggressively. Rich states with excessively high per capita emissions – such as Canada – have a practical and moral obligation to lead in these reductions, and yet Canada’s emissions continue to grow and no credible plan has been proposed for changing that.

These pipelines – and oil sands development generally – reduce humanity’s odds of avoiding dangerous climate change in two major ways:

- First, there are the direct impacts. Fossil fuels are burned in order to extract raw bitumen from the ground in Alberta. More are used to upgrade the materials that result into a form that can be transported through pipelines. Even more are used to refine those materials into fuels like gasoline and kerosene. Finally, the majority of the emissions are produced when those fuels are burned in things like automobiles and airplanes. This last point is critically important. The majority of the emissions from the oil sands occur at millions of disparate places, often from vehicles. This means that carbon capture and storage (CCS) – a technology that may one day allow greenhouse gases to be safely sequestered underground – can do little to reduce the environmental impact of the oil sands. All of these emissions contribute to the warming of the planet, diminish the size of humanity’s buffer of safety against abrupt or runaway climate change, and contribute to the acidification of the oceans through the increase in the atmospheric concentration of CO₂.
- Secondly, by investing billions more dollars into the oil sands, we are further committing ourselves to a pathway of economic development that is based on fossil fuels. Particularly given the seriousness of climate change, this is unwise. It is also unwise in that fossil fuels produce vast quantities of toxic air and water pollution, contribute to geopolitical instability, and inevitably leak out of the pipelines and transport tankers we use to transport them. Rather than chasing the world’s last and most dangerous fossil fuels, we should be investing in technology

and infrastructure that will allow us to permanently end our dependence upon them.

Canada should not be ignoring climate change, and yet the current Conservative government has failed to produce any viable plan to reduce Canadian emissions. It seems to be doing everything in its power to promote the rapid development of the oil sands, with no answer to the question of how that development can be reconciled with Canada's moral and legal¹ obligation to reduce emissions. As I mentioned at the outset, the benefits associated with oil sands extraction accrue to a specific group of individuals: the ones who use the fuels produced, and the ones who profit from their production. The people who suffer the consequences of these choices include everybody on Earth, including both those who are alive today and those in future generations. It is unjust for today's Canadians to impose the risk of severe climate change on future generations. Rather, we should be working to shift our development path onto one that is characterized by the development and deployment of low- and ultimately zero-carbon forms of energy.

Building these pipelines is triply wasteful. It is wasteful because – when the world as a whole finally gets serious about climate change – they will need to be scrapped. It is wasteful because they contribute further to the already-serious amount of damage being done to the climate by human activities. And it is wasteful because it delays the transition to low-carbon development, and does so in a way that will increase the costs of investing in the right technologies when we decide to do so at a later point. It would be far more efficient to begin an immediate and gradual process of decarbonization than it would be to wait until the seriousness of climate change forces an abrupt and costly transition that will require the scrapping of expensive but inappropriate infrastructure.

The oil sands contain a gigantic amount of carbon. If these pipelines are built, that carbon will begin to enter the atmosphere at an accelerating rate. The construction of pipelines will encourage more extraction activity, which will encourage still more

¹ Despite pulling out of the Kyoto Protocol, Canada is still bound by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which aims to prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference in the climate system.

pipelines. The asbestos industry in Canada shows how hard it is to shut down a damaging and unethical industry once it has been established. It would be a mistake to let the oil sands grow, particularly with the knowledge that the industry will be politically impossible to curb at a later point. Even in a best-case scenario where there are never any leaks or accidents, these pipelines will be bad for Canada and bad for the world.

I encourage you to speak out publicly against the Keystone XL and Northern Gateway pipelines, as well as against other pipelines intended to export fuel from the oil sands and efforts to do so by rail. I also encourage you to oppose efforts by the Conservative government to reduce the rigour of the environmental assessment process or try to drive easy approval of these projects in spite of all the legitimate concerns about climate change, leaks, and First Nations rights.

I would be very happy to discuss any of this further, at your convenience.

Thank you for your attention,

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