

Bob White, Emerado, N.D., letter: Pipeline, oil-sands oil not very good deal

Published Sunday, August 12, 2007

http://www.in-forum.com/articles/index.cfm?id=174778§ion=Opinion&forumcomm_check_return&freebie_check&CFID=48305772&CFTOKEN=16818504&jsessionid=88305051ac103f64f63

Recent discussions about the proposed Keystone pipeline have pointed out favorable aspects of such a line: revenue to landowners, provide needed oil for the country, reduce our dependency on Mideast oil, all very true. Opposing this position are a group of landowners and local residents who object to the line. They are being assisted in opposition by the Dakota Resource Council.

The landowners are concerned about damage to a scenic part of the state, possible harm to crop land, the unpleasant thought of eminent domain being used.

In all this discussion, one issue about Keystone was left out, perhaps because it isn't about the line itself, but about the oil that the line will transport. The crude oil being transported comes from the oil sands of Alberta. There are two methods for extracting this oil. One way is by drilling down through this very thick mixture, called bitumen, forcing high-pressure steam down the shaft to melt the oil from the sand. This process requires great quantities of water for the steam and great quantities of natural gas to heat that water into steam. This practice emits a lot of greenhouse gases into the air, and of course there will be more greenhouse gases when that crude oil is refined and then is burned.

The other process uses huge power shovels digging up the bitumen, loading it on some of the biggest trucks in the world, and then hauling it to a plant that uses huge amounts of water and natural gas to separate the oil from the bitumen.

After extraction processes, the crude oil must be kept heated along the pipeline to 72 degrees so it will flow. Thus all along the pipeline there will need to be heat added to keep the oil at the required temperature. Some type of heater, electric or natural gas, will use significant amounts of energy getting that oil to the refineries, over a thousand miles away.

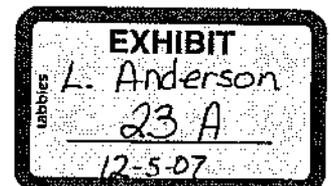
So, we are left to wonder if this oil is such a good deal. From an economic point of view, it may be profitable as long as the price of oil is high, around \$70 a barrel. And you all know what the price of gasoline will be when crude oil costs \$70 a barrel.

From an environmental point of view, they're burning fossil fuel to extract a fossil fuel which will then be burned, totaling far more carbon dioxide than conventional practices. And again, you all know what greenhouse gases are doing to our atmosphere, to our climate, to our world. Is this pipeline, this oil-sands oil, a really great deal?

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