

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 16, 2011

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton
US Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

We write to you today to express our deep concern over the Department of State's failure to sufficiently analyze the potential health impacts of increased air pollution in communities surrounding refineries that would receive raw crude oil through the proposed Keystone XL pipeline. As Members of the House of Representatives who share a common commitment to preserving public health, we are especially apprehensive over any attempts to accelerate the approval of this pipeline before such a study is completed.

In its June 6th, 2011 comment letter, the Environmental Protection Agency affirmed that, in the environmental impact statements issued by the State Department thus far, there has been no proper assessment of the prospective health risks posed by the Keystone XL pipeline on communities adjacent to refineries. As the State Department works towards the completion of its final environmental impact statement, we urge the department to commission a thorough analysis that would address the true health costs of this proposed project.

As your office is aware, the Keystone XL pipeline would transport up to 900,000 barrels of raw tar sands crude daily to refineries in the United States. In its natural state, raw tar sands crude is significantly more toxic and acidic than other types of crude oil and, during the refining process, may release a greater volume of harmful pollutants into the air. The pollutants released by the processing of tar sands oil are highly detrimental to human health and have been directly linked to incidents of lung and respiratory problems, as well as birth defects, in populations surrounding refineries.

The majority of oil refineries in America are concentrated in low-income and minority communities. These marginalized communities, which are already exposed to increased levels of air pollution, stand to bear the brunt of tar sands refining that would come as a result of the Keystone XL pipeline operations. Specifically, the areas of Houston and Port Arthur, Texas are expected to see the greatest increase in refining capacity from the pipeline. Populations residing in the immediate vicinity of these areas are already experiencing the damaging health effects of large-scale refinery pollution. We have a responsibility to thoroughly examine the health hazards associated with this project before exposing these at-risk communities to greater concentrations of toxic air pollutants.

Although we are requesting that a study be completed on the public health effects of refining tar sands crude, we are also aware that such refining is merely one of the dirty, hazardous processes associated with this type of raw crude oil, we also recognize the additional health risks posed by the extraction, production, shipment and use of this substance. These health hazards should be more carefully examined by the State Department before a permitting decision about the proposed Keystone XL pipeline is made.

We firmly believe that our government has a duty to properly assess the full range of risks this pipeline and associated refining activities may pose to public health before coming to a final decision on this matter. It would be highly irresponsible for the State Department to permit the construction and operation of the Keystone XL pipeline before a thorough analysis of the health threats associated with the refining of tar sands oil is completed. For this reason, we urge the State Department to undertake such an analysis in its final environmental impact statement that is expected to be released in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson
Member of Congress



Robert Andrews
Member of Congress



Chris Van Hollen
Member of Congress



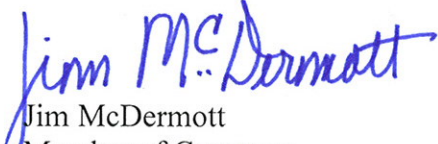
Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



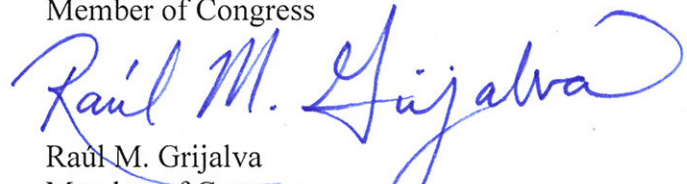
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



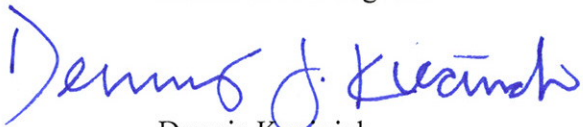
Edward Markey
Member of Congress



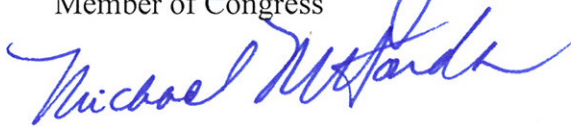
Jim McDermott
Member of Congress




Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Dennis Kucinich
Member of Congress



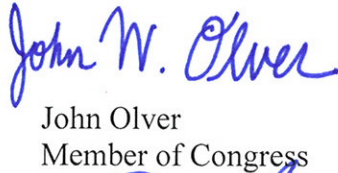
Mike Honda
Member of Congress

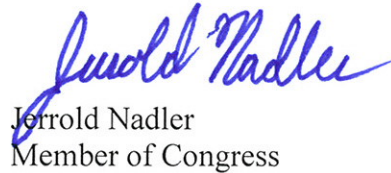

Charlie Rangel
Member of Congress

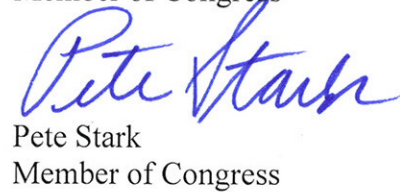

Alcee Hastings
Member of Congress

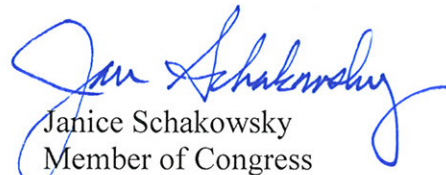

Bob Filner
Member of Congress

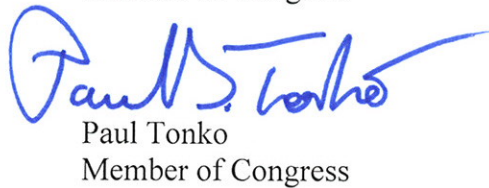

Mazie Hirono
Member of Congress

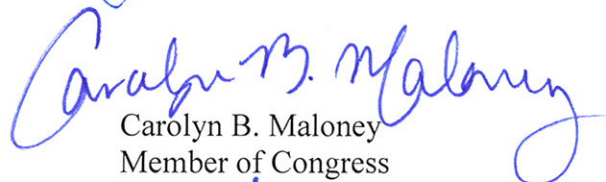

John Olver
Member of Congress

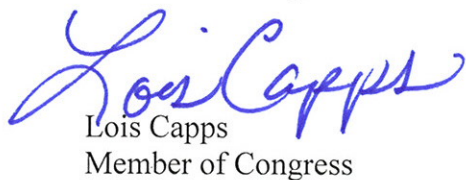

Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

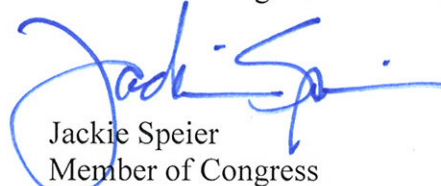

Pete Stark
Member of Congress

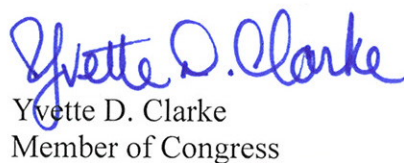

Janice Schakowsky
Member of Congress


Paul Tonko
Member of Congress


Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress

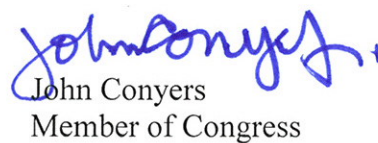

Lois Capps
Member of Congress


Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

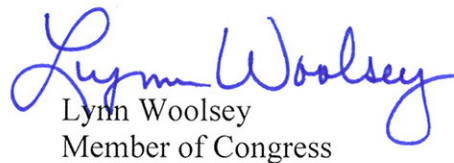

Yvette D. Clarke
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Steve Cohen
Member of Congress


Diana DeGette
Member of Congress

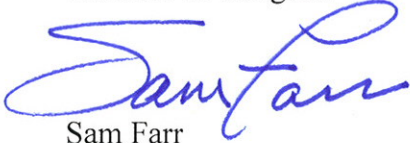

John Conyers
Member of Congress


Steve Rothman
Member of Congress

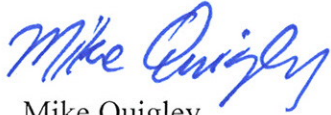

Lynn Woolsey
Member of Congress



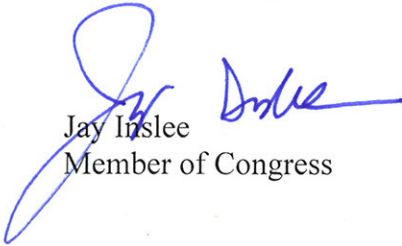
Jesse L. Jackson, Jr.
Member of Congress



Sam Farr
Member of Congress



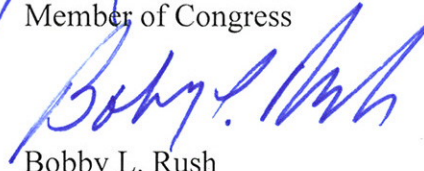
Mike Quigley
Member of Congress



Jay Inslee
Member of Congress



Donna Christensen
Member of Congress



Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress



Keith Ellison
Member of Congress



David Price
Member of Congress