

Opening Statement—Representative Suzanne Bonamici

*House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Joint Hearing of Energy and Environment Subcommittees:
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Thank you, Chair Stewart and Chair Lummis. I want to welcome our witnesses and thank you all for participating in today's hearing about the Keystone XL Pipeline. The discussion we are having today is important because the Keystone pipeline project highlights an issue that this committee has been debating for a long time: climate change caused by human activity. There has been disagreement with colleagues across the aisle regarding the human role in the changing climate. For that reason, I was pleased two weeks ago when the Subcommittee on the Environment held a climate change hearing in which all the witnesses agreed in their testimony that global warming is happening, humans are contributing to it, and the country must take action to address it.

This is relevant to today's hearing because the Keystone XL Pipeline showcases our continued dependence on fossil fuels, the use of which contributes greatly to anthropogenic climate change. I am pleased that this hearing will also address potential negative impacts of the pipeline on those living and working along the proposed pipeline route, including those engaged in agricultural activities. I'm glad that the witnesses will also be discussing the pipeline's impact on land use and that they will discuss potential threats that large-scale pipeline projects can pose to fragile water resources. Also significant are local concerns about the clean-up of potential spills from the pipeline. I join many of my colleagues who know that we must be thoughtful and informed before we give the go-ahead to traverse thousands of miles of the American countryside with new infrastructure for an old energy source.

According to the State Department's Draft Environmental Impact Statement, the Keystone XL Pipeline will bring thousands of temporary construction jobs and positively impact local economies at a time when our country is navigating through a slow economic recovery. These short-term benefits to our economy should not be overlooked, but they should be considered alongside the substantial environmental and safety challenges presented by the Pipeline, including the potentially disastrous impact on the local economy if a spill were to occur.

That happened not too long ago in Michigan. A pipeline transporting oil from Canada to U.S. destinations ruptured and spilled 800,000 gallons of crude oil into the Kalamazoo River. Now, three years later, cleanup has yet to be completed because of the difficult task of getting the heavy oil sands out from the river floor where much of it remains submerged. The EPA recently recommended that the State Department take a closer look at how spills of oil sands may require different response actions or equipment from response actions for conventional oil spills. That's why Congress requested that the National Academy of Sciences study this type of oil, and it is my hope that we will soon know more about what differences exist between oil sands and conventional crudes.

In closing, although I would never claim to speak for all Democrats on the Keystone project specifically, we do all agree that our country must set ambitious goals to combat anthropogenic climate change. Fossil fuels will continue to play a role in powering our economy for the foreseeable future, but we must also invest more in renewable energy as the 21st century solution to combat climate change, boost our job markets, and reduce our dependence on fossil fuels over the long term. I look forward to hearing the witnesses' perspectives on the environmental and safety issues associated with this project. And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.