

A state of denial

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If the Keystone XL pipeline is built, 35 million gallons of tar sands oil — some of the dirtiest fossil fuels on Earth — would be sent some 1,700 miles from Canada to the Gulf Coast, and then much of it would be exported to other countries.

Scientists offer a grim picture if all of the tar sands oil is burned up: It will lock us into the deepening climate crisis that's already setting off record temperatures, epic droughts, wild-fires and melting sea ice in the Arctic.

In Florida, that means accelerating predicted sea level rise — some parts of the state could be inundated by three to six feet of water by 2100 — and more intense storms that, once fairly rare, are beginning to feel commonplace.

The Keystone project relies on a vast expanse of tar sands oil in Alberta, Canada. Not only does this project pollute and destroy Canada's amazing boreal forests but it comes at a steep price for our climate.

Developing this fuel produces two to three times more global warming pollution than conventional oil. If it moves ahead, it will be "game over" for avoiding catastrophic climate change, according to Dr. Jim Hansen, one of the world's leading climate scientists.

Keystone isn't a done deal — yet.

President Obama has the power to secure Florida's future by ensuring this poisonous oil is never burned. Because this pipeline crosses an international border, the State Department must declare the pipeline in the national interest and the president must concur before the pipeline is approved.

The Keystone XL pipeline clearly isn't in the national interest. Florida's story is just one of a thousand across this country that can teach Americans why. A low-lying state with more than 1,000 miles of coastline that's firmly in the hurricane belt can ill afford a tar sands oil boom.

Among the first states where "game over" would become a reality? Florida. We are the canary in the coal mine for climate impacts.

In the 1970s our coral reefs started to bleach because of rising ocean temperatures. This bleaching continues to this day. We will be among the most impacted by more intense storms and storm surges. Our coastal cities will be among the first decimated by sea level rise.

Each day scientists who monitor the earth see the climate changing faster than they predicted. It's getting hotter, storms are getting

weirder, wildfires and droughts are becoming more extreme. The past 10 years have been the warmest in 11,000 years. With these facts piling up why would United States enable the burning of the largest deposit of the dirtiest fuel on the planet?

This notion is even more ludicrous when you consider that the United States is being asked to shoulder 100 percent of the risk while Big Oil rakes in 100 percent of the profits and much of the oil winds up overseas.

You might think Florida is in good hands if President Obama is making the decision, right? He knows climate change is a real threat. He believes in clean energy. He won Florida twice behind an army of young voters who believed in his promise of a new clean energy future. It's time to make good on those promises and rejecting Keystone would be an important step.

To do that, though, he'll need to ignore the oil company propaganda on Keystone:

Myth: Keystone XL will make us energy independent. Fact: Much of the oil will be sold on the world market and not consumed by Americans.

Myth: The Keystone XL pipeline will be safe. Fact: The first pipeline they built, Keystone 1, spilled 14 times in its three short years of existence, including 21,000 gallons in 2011. The State Department predicts Keystone XL could leak up to 100 times.

What to do? Fortunately, there's a growing, grassroots opposition to Keystone XL. Some 50,000 people marched in Washington last month. Acts of civil disobedience are sprouting up across the country. Young people are

launching dirty energy divestment campaigns on college campuses. Momentum is building for a clean energy future.

Floridians need to get in on the action.

Students of Florida's colleges: Launch divestment campaigns. Get our universities out of the oil business.

Coastal cities: Pass resolutions urging Obama to reject this pipeline.

Young voters: Speak truth to power; tell your representatives to embrace sane, safe energy policies that will save Florida and our climate.

Gov. Rick Scott: Stop undoing Gov. Charlie Crist's clean energy legacy.

Sen. Bill Nelson: Keep up the good work, but step up the fight. You need to lead the charge against Keystone XL.

Sen. Marco Rubio: Fight for Florida, not the tea party, and lead on clean energy and climate change.

Florida is still in many ways the center of the political universe. Now is the time to use that influence, even on a disastrous project that starts 3,000 miles from our homes. Our future depends on it.