

Will Heineman do a flip-flop on the pipe?

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Posted: Tuesday, December 11, 2012 12:00 am

The TransCanada Keystone pipeline hearing in Albion, Neb., was last Tuesday night.

Far more people signed up to testify than the NDEQ allowed time for, so many in attendance submitted written instead of oral testimony. I was one of those.

I also submitted as part of my testimony, Gov. Dave Heineman's letter to President Obama and Secretary Clinton, dated Aug. 31, 2011. You will see that in a few moments.

I began my testimony, "I stand here tonight 200 feet from one of the world's most amazing natural wonders, the Ogallala Aquifer. In fact, everyone in this room is less than 200 feet from it. It is not a mirage or just a light blue spot on a map. It's right below our feet.

If there is one single thing that defines the state of Nebraska, it is agriculture, and if there is one single thing that defines our ability to have an agricultural economy, it is the Ogallala Aquifer.

With the aquifer we provide more jobs to Nebraskans than a thousand pipelines. Without the aquifer, we are once again the Great American Desert, relinquished to the observation of Edwin James, an 1800s geographer who said of our land, "I do not hesitate in giving the opinion, that it is almost wholly unfit for cultivation, and of course, uninhabitable by a people depending upon agriculture for their subsistence."

Do you understand? The Ogallala Aquifer is our environment, is our economy, and is the single most valuable resource in our state, bar none!

So I am puzzled as to why anyone, Nebraskan or not, would put at risk even one single drop of this precious resource ... ever!

I also stand before you today in full agreement with Gov. Dave Heineman, when he wrote an Aug. 31, 2011 letter to President Obama and Secretary Clinton mentioning the Ogallala Aquifer no less than five times."

Here is that letter:

August 31, 2011

Dear President Obama and Secretary Clinton:

I am writing to you today regarding a very important issue to the State of Nebraska and to our citizens - the Keystone XL Pipeline. I am opposed to the proposed route of this pipeline.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement compares a potential spill in the Sand Hills region to a 1979 Bemidji,

Minn., spill and concludes that “the impacts to shallow groundwater from a spill of a similar volume in the Sand Hills region would affect a limited area of the aquifer around the spill site.”

I disagree with this analysis, and I believe that the pipeline should not cross a substantial portion of the Ogallala Aquifer.

Of the current proposed route, 254 miles of the pipeline would come through Nebraska and be situated directly over the Ogallala Aquifer. The aquifer provides water to farmers and ranchers of Nebraska to raise livestock and grow crops.

Nebraska has 92,685 registered, active irrigation wells supplying water to over 8.5 million acres of harvested cropland and pasture. Forty-six percent of the total cropland harvested during 2007 was irrigated.

Maintaining and protecting Nebraska's water supply is very important to me and the residents of Nebraska. This resource is the lifeblood of Nebraska's agriculture industry.

Cash receipts from farm markets contribute over \$17 billion to Nebraska's economy annually. I am concerned that the proposed pipeline will potentially have detrimental effects on this valuable natural resource and Nebraska's economy.

I want to emphasize that I am not opposed to pipelines. We already have hundreds of them in our state. I am opposed to the proposed Keystone XL Pipeline route because it is directly over the Ogallala Aquifer.

Therefore, I am asking you to disapprove TransCanada's pending permit request. Do not allow TransCanada to build a pipeline over the Ogallala Aquifer and risk the potential damage to Nebraska's water.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,
Dave Heineman,
Governor

Now many of you reading this have been led to believe TransCanada moved the pipeline route off the Ogallala Aquifer. This is not true.

They not only didn't move it off the Aquifer, they actually cross more miles of the aquifer than they would have in their first route! Sure they went around a few sandhills in Holt County, and they believe that will satisfy Gov. Heineman.

If our governor's words mean anything, and I am talking about the words in his letter to the president, then let's look at them once again. Gov. Dave Heineman said, "I am opposed to the proposed Keystone XL Pipeline route because it is directly over the Ogallala Aquifer."

Well, governor, if you see this, and I will make sure you do, then it would seem your decision is already made for you. TransCanada's exaggerated claims of fortune don't add up to 1/10th of 1 percent of what our great state produces agriculturally, made possible by that one single thing that defines our way of life here in Nebraska, the Ogallala Aquifer.

TransCanada likes to talk a lot about good neighbors. Well, here in Nebraska we know a few things about good neighbors, and what better neighbor (less than couple hundred feet away) to practically every single one of us than the Ogallala Aquifer?

So I, like the governor, remain “opposed to the proposed Keystone XL Pipeline route because it is directly over the Ogallala Aquifer.”

I urge Gov. Heineman to deny the new route request by TransCanada, and insist they do what they should have done originally; respect our Governor, respect Nebraskans, respect and go around the great Ogallala Aquifer.