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GUEST VIEWPOINT

Oregon must act to block proposed pipeline

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On March 7, the state of New York blocked construction of the Northern Access Pipeline, proposed to carry fracked gas 99 miles from Pennsylvania to Canada. Similarities to the proposed Pacific Connector Pipeline, from Klamath Falls to Coos Bay, are evident.

Both proposals cross rural regions with hundreds of landowners subject to property condemnation, methane pollution and loss of market value for their land. Both imperil fish, rivers and water supplies — the New York pipeline would have crossed 192 streams; Oregon's would put 400 streams at risk, including many with salmon such as the renowned Rogue River.

Upping the ante in Oregon, the pipeline's destination would be Jordan Cove — a terminal for the export of fracked gas that lies at sea level in the bullseye of the nation's most extreme tsunami zone (think Fukushima) and earthquake hotspot. Here along the Cascadia Fault, magnitude 9 quakes — far graver than anything in California — are not just likely but inevitable near the terminal and the pipeline route.

Both pipelines threaten states with Democratic governors and with state agencies that care about climate change. In this regard, forget the myth that gas is clean. The latest data on methane leakage from gas facilities finds that this fuel is worse than coal in its global-warming effects.

Long-term jobs totaling 146 in Coos Bay are not worth the price that other Oregonians would pay for losing their land, or the price that all of us would pay by putting our streams, fisheries and safety at risk.

Those who saw the folly of the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines waited too long to make their opposition known. The state of Oregon cannot afford the same mistake. New York got the message. So should we.

Our state government can take the initiative to halt the use of eminent domain against landowners and to avoid pollution of our air and water with fracked gas. We can say “no” to foreign corporations selling our precious energy resources to foreign nations that are not even friendly to our national ideals. We can avoid putting our streams and fisheries — sport and commercial — at red-alert risk.

The importance of Oregon taking action to defend itself against the globalization of fossil fuel industries is urgent, because the Trump administration will be appointing four of the five members of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which is responsible for pipeline decisions. While the FERC of 2016 acted twice, and unanimously, to deny the Pacific Connector Pipeline, the Canadian developer is reapplying, and FERC's reasoned decisions of the past will likely be reversed when President Trump appoints clones of Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt to the commission. Then, lacking state resolve, our future will be sold by foreign corporations to their beneficiaries in China.

But that doesn't have to happen. Under the federal Clean Water Act, FERC cannot preempt state decisions to protect Oregon streams.

Anyone who recognizes the need to address climate change but supports the worst in fossil fuel development — right here in our own backyards — is only giving lip service to the greatest challenge of our times.

Our governor and our state agencies should take preemptive action to spare Oregon the problems that the Pacific Connector Pipeline will cause. If New York can do it, why can't we?

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