

# Johanns, Smith Want Keystone XL Before Safety Studies Are Completed

**Greg Awtry Publisher**

**Posted: Tuesday, November 20, 2012 12:00 am**

Last week, Mike Johanns joined the growing group of politicians who can't be trusted.

He signed a letter urging President Obama to approve the Keystone XL pipeline through Nebraska and the Ogallala aquifer.

In doing so Sen. Johanns performed a Romney-like flip-flop, completely changing his position that the potentially deadly pipeline should avoid the Ogallala Aquifer.

He also displayed complete disregard for the newly passed pipeline bill, calling for an extensive study on Diluted Bitumen (tar sands diluted with chemicals to thin it enough to be pumped through our aquifer). That report won't be ready until next year.

The new bill also calls for an exhaustive study on pipeline companies' leak detection process and again, that study must take a minimum of two years.

Last week's letter seems to be in stark contrast to Johanns' earlier letters. In a letter to Secretary of State Clinton in 2010, Johanns said there is, "heightened environmental sensitivity when a pipeline traverses an irreplaceable natural resource, the Ogallala Aquifer ..." In another letter to Clinton, Johanns writes in October 2010, "... I have repeatedly expressed concern that regulatory actions related to this permit application be executed such that maximum care is taken to safeguard the Ogallala Aquifer, an irreplaceable natural resource in the state of Nebraska."

Then again on August 31, 2011 Johanns wrote, "'I support Governor Heineman's request that President Obama and Secretary Clinton deny the current application from TransCanada to build the Keystone XL pipeline along a route crossing Nebraska's Sand Hills and the center of the Ogallala

Aquifer. The proposed route is the wrong route.”

Well, Sen. Johanns, it is clear to Nebraskans you were just using the Ogallala Aquifer for political cover which is disappointing, as Nebraskans use the aquifer to supply our drinking water and to turn what was once called the Great American Desert into some of the most productive agricultural land in the world.

You see, we don't play politics with our future, and you need to understand Nebraskans will go to great lengths to preserve and protect what you call, “an irreplaceable natural resource.” If you were as concerned about the aquifer as you said, then why not let the two federal studies be completed before you sign a letter asking for immediate approval?

So to whom can we turn to help us protect the aquifer, the health of our citizens and the lifeblood of our economy? How about Congressman Adrian Smith? Smith's position on the Keystone has remained constant, flawed, but constant. He has repeatedly stated he will adhere to the science of the project.

Congressman Smith, in a colossal flip-flop now chooses to ignore the new pipeline law and the two studies that must be done regarding the toxic DilBit and leak detection process.

Smith also sits on the House Ways and Means Committee, the same committee, according to the IRS, that said that DilBit is neither oil nor petroleum and therefore not subject to the 8-cents per barrel Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund tax!

That gives Canadian producers and or refineries nearly a \$50 million tax break and \$23 million of that will go to companies that would use the Keystone XL to transport their dirty oil. Does that make any sense at all?

This pipeline will have spills. Every study, including those done by TransCanada acknowledges that fact.

The recent spill in Michigan has cost nearly a billion dollars to clean up, so why isn't Congressman Smith, whose entire third district would be sliced open with the dangerous pipeline, introducing legislation demanding that Canadian DilBit be subject to the same tax as North Dakota crude oil that will be taxed and will go through the exact same pipe?

And finally we have Governor Dave Heineman, who also wrote President Obama and Secretary Clinton. In his letter he said, "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 in 2007 was irrigated ... I am concerned that the proposed pipeline will potentially have detrimental effects on this valuable natural resource and Nebraska's economy... and I believe that the pipeline should not cross a substantial portion of the Ogallala aquifer."

Maybe it's just me because I make a living with words, but words mean something. Whether they are written, spoken or just given, as in, "I give you my word." It is important we hold accountable those who give us their words.

Nebraskans, you are caught squarely in the middle of two of our federal representatives' obvious failure to stand up and fight to protect Nebraska's most valuable resource at all cost, and a governor who has to make a decision on the Keystone XL route.

On Dec. 4, in Albion, Neb., there will be a public hearing, hosted by the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality to review TransCanada's poor excuse for a re-route across the state, which still crosses, as Heineman put it, a "substantial" part of the aquifer. Hundreds of Nebraskans will be there.

I think Heineman, Johanns, Smith, along with Deb Fischer, a Sandhills rancher and newly elected U.S. Senator whose family business is dependent on the aquifer, should all be there.

What are the chances any of the four will attend? Are you kidding me? That would take courage and conviction.

They have already shown us what they are made of.