

**Testimony before the House Oversight Subcommittee on the Environment  
The Role of Fossil Fuel Subsidies in Preventing Action on the Climate Crisis  
Tara Houska, Founder, Giniw Collective  
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**Introduction**

Boozhoo,

My name is Tara Houska and I am an attorney and organizer from Couchiching First Nation Anishinaabe on the border of Ontario and Minnesota. I am the co-founder of Not Your Mascots and the founder of the Giniw Collective. I spent six months on the frontlines fighting the Dakota Access Pipeline, and am currently engaged in the movement to defund fossil fuels and a years-long struggle against Enbridge's Line 3 pipeline in northern Minnesota.

**Indigenous Rights and Leadership**

The most common perception of Native people is that we are 'people of the past' — that we are a static footnote in history. We were here before the arrival of the United States, before America, before Canada, and we live on still. There is a long history of dispossession, genocide, and removal; then almost nothing. Too often, people think we didn't keep progressing after the late 1800s.

Indigenous peoples are just five percent of the global population, yet eighty percent of the world's remaining biodiversity is in Indigenous lands. We are the last holders of the sacred places left on Earth. Despite this, our voices are often absent from the table of solving climate crisis. Our sovereignty is not absolute and instead is subject to the whims of the judiciary and a confusing web of governmental authority often heavily influenced by special interests.

One solution beyond teaching the basic truths of life — that we all need healthy water, air, and soil to live — is the imperative that we stand together centering justice, equity, and reconnect to the living world as beings in community with our Mother. We know what a just transition should look like. We must find what that looks like for everyone, as water shortages are already ongoing. We must protect communities that are already at risk, those who are impacted first and worst.

Indigenous peoples never lost our connection to the land and to the water. Many of us live in community with our Mother as a practice, not in theory. I always ask people to find out where their food comes from, where their water comes from, and to truly internalize what that means. So many people buy things and don't have a second thought about the hands and places their purchases came from. They turn on their tap and or buy a bottle of water and don't think about the journey from the Earth to their lips. Everything comes from somewhere. Every bit of life comes from the Earth and everything is returned to the Earth, including human beings.

## **Line 3**

### *Intro to Line 3*

Canadian company, Enbridge's, proposed new Line 3 would be one of the largest tar sands oil pipelines in the world, carrying up to 915,000 barrels per day of one of the dirtiest fuels on the planet. Enbridge calls it a "replacement" project but it is larger, with higher volume, in a new corridor through ecosystems untouched by fossil fuel infrastructure. Enbridge consistently uses underhanded methods to achieve its project goals and plays fast and loose with safety and spill response plans. First Nations, tribal governments, landowners, environmental groups, and communities across the Great Lakes have been fighting for over 7 years to stop this new corridor and Stop Line 3. Ojibwe nations are suing in the courts, Minnesota's own Department of Commerce is suing for failure to justify the line via an oil forecast, and the people are fighting on the ground, chaining ourselves to the literal machines to protect the water and stand up for those not yet born.

Line 3 is personal for me because it goes through my people's territory and endangers that which sits at the center of our people's way of life and migration story — wild rice. There are the threats to the drinking water of millions, as Line 3 seeks to pass through the Mississippi River headwaters, there are the emissions and all the irrevocable harms of expanding the fossil fuel industry in the face of climate crisis. When it comes to wild rice, there is a threat to the cultural survival of my people.

Wild rice, what we call manoomin, is at the center of our people's culture and connection to the world. This is the only place in the world that it grows. It is where Creator told us to go — to where the food grows on water. Line 3 proposes to pass adjacent to some of the richest wild rice beds in the whole of the world. To me, Line 3 is a continuation of cultural genocide to treat eradication of our sacred like a sacrifice zone. Our traditional economies of harvesting are expendable to the economy of extraction. We endured forced removal, theft of lands, theft of culture through boarding schools, and now we endure the industry's want to eradicate what we have left.

Enbridge touts its tribal consultation, yet three Ojibwe nations are suing against this destructive project. Tribal consent is simply not there. The UN reported human rights abuses that were enacted on unarmed citizens demonstrating against the Dakota Access Pipeline. These abuses are already happening in the fight against Line 3 as well. Enbridge is actively paying local law enforcement, through a "Public Safety Escrow Trust" overseen by Minnesota. We are surveilled, we are harassed, we are targeted. I myself was put into a kennel, strip searched and shackled for misdemeanor charges brought for praying in a sacred lodge directly in the pipeline's path.

### *Climate Change and Subsidies*

Continuing current fossil fuel subsidies would make it profitable to extract [half](#) of all domestic oil reserves. It could increase U.S. oil production by 17 billion barrels over the next few decades

and emit an additional 6 billion tons of carbon dioxide. That's the [equivalent](#) of 1.3 billion cars on the road in a year.

Fossil fuel companies negatively impact Indigenous and human rights, and local and global waters and the climate. Climate change is happening now. There are already people migrating from places that are out of water. We need to have to have some serious conversations as human beings living in this shared world about what kind of world we want it to be.

Scientists tell us we need to reduce carbon pollution emissions to prevent the worst impacts of the climate crisis. Our elders and traditional people see the rapid changes in the forests, on the land happening in real time. What kind of nation are we when so many Native people lack access to running water and hold the lowest life expectancy of the population, yet we continually provide massive taxpayer subsidies that increase fossil-fuel companies' already astronomic profits? What kind of nation are we if we still cannot uphold the basic contractual obligations in treaties signed to create the United States after centuries of violation?

Instead of subsidizing fossil fuels, we should invest in Indigenous Peoples as central actors in shaping economic change and decision-making regarding our lands and territories. We should invest in sustainable renewable energy and a just transition. We should invest in better and more just economic initiatives, paradigms, and structures.

## **Conclusion**

I recognize that my words might appear idealistic, that I do not understand the way of the world, that it cannot change so easily or readily. I wonder, though, if you believe humans have truly conquered the Earth. If we can live without water. If we are civilized if the cost is globalized destruction of our shared and only home. We're in rough shape, as a species. I want to look upon the faces of my grandchildren and tell them I did everything I possibly could to give them a better world. That I did not linger in words and incremental policy without substantive action as the world burns and the seas rise. I pray you do too.