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Bill 8: Government Listens with Selective Hearing

The recent announcement that the Government of Alberta will introduce Bill 8 (Electric Utilities Amendment Act, 2012) to effectively overturn amendments made through Bill 50 (Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009) is underwhelming to say the least.

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) applauds the bill that would require all future transmission infrastructure projects go through a full needs-assessment process by the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC), but we are acutely disappointed that Bill 8 does not address the significant projects approved under Bill 50.

It is unclear to Albertans why transmission lines -that appear to commit Alberta to a future of coal-fired energy while there is a global movement towards cleaner energy sources- were pushed through without due process and whether they are actually needed or in the best interest of Albertans.

Along with the welcome changes addressed in Bill 8, AWA would like to see a halt to projects approved under the questionable amendments of Bill 50 until a proper and transparent needs-assessment is carried out by the AUC.

“Albertans want answers to outstanding questions surrounding these lines: does the province actually need them, what do they mean for the trajectory of Alberta’s energy future, and why was the public excluded from the process?” says Katie Rasmussen, a Conservation Specialist with the Alberta Wilderness Association. “Through Bill 8 the government is acknowledging the importance of this process to Albertans; clearly it must be applied to these current projects as well as all future plans.”

“The Minister says that they have listened to Albertans; if they were really listening to the public they would have heard that Albertans want an independent needs-assessment with open and transparent public engagement. We need this to happen before these huge new projects go ahead, to decide whether or not these transmission lines are really in the public best interest.”

Background:

In late 2009, the Government of Alberta passed the Electric Statutes Amendment Act (Bill 50) which amended the Electrical Utilities Act and the Alberta Utilities Commission Act to allow the government to bypass the needs-assessment process normally carried out by an independent agency, the AUC. The needs-assessment process is a critical step in determining if new projects are actually needed and if they are in the best interest of Albertans now and into the future. It also creates a necessary space for public input into decision-making.

Under Bill 50, in the absence of due process, and with growing suspicion about the lack of transparency around many decisions made by the government, four “critical transmission infrastructure” projects were approved including the hotly debated Heartland Transmission Project, and the Eastern and Western Alberta Transmission Lines. These projects will cost billions of dollars and the motives and need behind their approval have been questioned by many. The newly announced Bill 8 would remove government’s ability to bypass the AUC needs-assessment process for all future projects, but would not





impact the lines already approved under Bill 50. Government needs to enact Bill 8 before moving any further forward with these projects that have elicited such widespread objection.

For more information:

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