

Crowsnest Coal: Desperate Times Call For...Character Assassination and Dirty Politics?

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Yesterday, the debate over whether coal mining in Alberta should have a future took a very dirty, nasty turn. It came from a group in the Crowsnest Pass that passionately supports coal mining. Passionate support is one thing, character assassination is something entirely different. This group of coal mining supporters is doing the latter.

News reports suggest the group wrote to the Premier and Energy Minister Savage claiming that the Coal Policy Committee's message to Minister Savage will be anti-coal and therefore "distorted." If the Coal Policy Committee recommends against mining along the Eastern Slopes, this group appears to believe that Bill Trafford, panel member and past-President of Livingstone Landowners Group, will be largely responsible. Trafford apparently is in cahoots with a familiar bogeyman – an environmental organization with supporters in the U.S. (as well as Canada), the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative. Together they allegedly have flooded the Committee with emails opposing coal.

"This attack on Bill Trafford's integrity, and by extension the integrity of Dr. Wallace and the committee's work, signals the desperate, unethical measures some members of the pro-coal constituency feel they need to take," said Ian Urquhart, Executive Director of Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA).

These attacks against the Coal Policy Committee's work conveniently ignore very clear public opinion evidence that Albertans don't want coal mining to despoil the Eastern Slopes. For example, it ignores Think HQ's February 2021 poll that found 69% of those aware of the coal mining issue opposed mining in areas of the Rockies and foothills that were previously set aside for environmental reasons.

It also ignores AWA's own analysis of the public comments made to the Grassy Mountain Coal Project Joint Review Panel. Public opposition to Grassy Mountain was overwhelming. Of the 4,411 individual comments left on the public registry about the project, a stunning 98 percent were opposed to coal mining. Only 69 people (1.6 percent) spoke in favour of the project.

"Given indicators like these," Urquhart said, "it should be no surprise to hear Dr. Wallace say that most submissions to the Coal Policy Committee were "strongly opposed" to coal mining. The problems prospective coal miners face in Alberta aren't foreign funded conservation campaigns, they are homegrown

Albertans who treasure the mountains and their watersheds."

Unlike the Crowsnest Pass group, AWA believes questioning the integrity of Committee members is simply wrong. Such dirty tactics with respect to Committee members who spoke out in favour of coal mining or led organizations supporting coal mining also would be beyond the pale. Trafford's fellow committee member Fred Bradley gave evidence supporting Grassy Mountain to the federal-provincial review of that project. Committee member Natalie Charlton is the executive director of the Hinton and District Chamber of Commerce.

"What this group in the Crowsnest Pass has done is try to debase the important, vital work of the Coal Committee," said Urquhart. "They should be ashamed of themselves for trying to do so through insinuation and invective rather than reason."

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