

Is Elections Alberta Applying Alberta's Political Advertising Legislation to Coal Companies/Lobbyists?

December 29, 2021



Are Alberta coal companies and lobbyists subject to Alberta's political/election advertising legislation? It's been a month today since AWA first posed two simple, straightforward questions about this to Elections Alberta. To date, Elections Alberta only has responded to AWA's first request with this: "We are looking into the matter and we will respond in due course." AWA re-iterated this request on December 14th; that second note wasn't acknowledged.

"Given the simple, straightforward questions we posed to Elections Alberta," said Ian Urquhart, AWA's Executive Director, "the failure to provide a substantive answer one month later is troubling and unacceptable."

AWA wrote Elections Alberta and asked why Montem Resources, Elan/Atrum Coal, and responsiblemining.ca are not registered with Elections Alberta as third-party political advertisers. All have purchased advertising promoting opening up the Eastern Slopes to coal mining. Their advertising should qualify as political advertising under Alberta election finance legislation. Any actor spending more than \$1,000 on political advertising (or that plans to spend more than \$1,000) must register with Elections Alberta. None of these

companies/lobbyist organizations are not on that registration list.

AWA isn't the first conservation group to raise the political advertising activities of coal companies/lobbyists with Elections Alberta. Nor is AWA the first group to have its questions remain unanswered. Dave Eaton, a moderator of the *Protect Alberta's Rockies and Headwaters* Facebook group, wrote to Elections Alberta on July 5, 2021 about responsiblemining.ca. Elections Alberta never answered his questions about responsiblemining.ca's advertising, its sponsorship by Atrum Coal, and whether it must register as a third-party political advertiser.

Eaton's inquiries came after Elections Alberta wrote the Facebook group on June 22, 2021 to advise the group that it 'appears to meet the legislative requirements to register with Elections Alberta...' "My questions about applying the law to coal lobbyists," Eaton said, "were driven by the belief Elections Alberta must show they were applying the law equally to both sides in the coal mining debate." Four months later, Elections Alberta hasn't provided any answers to those questions.

David Swann, former MLA, represented Calgary-Mountain View in the Legislature when the third party political advertising provisions of Alberta's electoral laws were introduced, debated, and passed. Swann believes the apparent failure of Elections Alberta to apply the legislation to the coal lobby runs directly against that law's intent. In part, the law was intended to provide transparency regarding the political advertising of corporations. "I am concerned that Elections Alberta may be unduly influenced by the UCP government in investigating these coal companies," Swann said. "It's time for Elections Alberta to state why coal companies are, or are not, registered as third party political advertisers."

Today the Coal Policy Committee submitted its reports to Energy Minister Savage. Election Alberta's behaviour raises troubling suspicions. It suggests that, when it comes to coal, government organizations are showing political favouritism. It fuels concerns that the UCP cabinet, caucus, and government departments may be predisposed to interpret the Coal Policy Committee's work in an overly advantageous way to those who want to reintroduce coal mining to Alberta's Rockies and Foothills.

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