



Volume 23, Number 2 — February 13th, 2019

Climate Action: The Time is Now!

Fighting climate change isn't just about fighting against coal mines and for a price on carbon. It's also about the complex world of Public Service Commission decisions. It's about fighting to protect electricity consumers from monopoly utilities that make more money by spending more money on expensive electricity generation sources such as the Colstrip power plant. Energy markets have changed so much in recent years that protecting consumers and protecting the environment are hand-in-glove issues. This issue of *Capitol Monitor* focuses on bills trying to change the way the Montana Public Service Commission oversees monopoly utilities such as NorthWestern Energy. These decisions are the ones that will help to determine both the future of the world we live in and affect our pocketbooks. Never have those two things been so in tandem, and we need your help.

Contact the House and Senate Energy Committees to Ask that They Stand Up for Clean Energy

Many clean energy bills are working their way through the Legislature that would significantly impact clean energy development in Montana, in both good and bad ways. You can leave a message for the House Federal Relations, Energy, and Telecommunications Committee by calling (406) 444-3078, the Senate Energy and Telecommunications Committee by calling (406) 444-1527, and you can reach the governor by calling (406) 444-3111.

HB 78: Require Public Hearings for Utility Planning

Sponsor: Rep. Zac Perry, *D-Hungry Horse*.

Status: *Passed the House Energy Committee on an 11-1 vote. Passed the House on a 79-20 vote. Awaiting a hearing in the Senate Energy Committee.*

Position: Support.

This bill would require for-profit utilities (i.e., NorthWestern Energy and Montana-Dakota Utilities) to hold at least two public meetings as part of their long-term resource planning processes. This is a consumer protection bill. By allowing more experts to provide perspective and feedback to the utility that it might not otherwise have access to or consider, it is less likely a utility will make poor or overpriced investments (the cost of which falls on ratepayers). All other major utilities in the Northwest hold open planning meetings. Currently, NorthWestern's meetings are invite-only and the utility controls the invitation. **HB 78** takes us in the right direction for transparency, consumer protection, and brings us closer to achieving the industry standard to have open planning meetings.

HB 314: Require Certain Utilities to File General Rate Cases

Sponsor: Rep. Tom Woods, *D-Bozeman*.

Status: *Heard in the House Energy Committee on February 4th. Awaiting a vote in that committee.*

Position: Support.

Contact your legislators

Who are my legislators?

Visit www.votesmart.org, and search by address.

Online:

Visit www.meic.org for profiles and contact information of every Montana legislator.

By Phone:

Leave a message for your legislator: **(406) 444-4800** between 7:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 8 a.m. until adjournment on Saturday.

By Mail:

Montana Senate
P.O. Box 200500
Helena, MT 59620-0500

Montana House of Representatives
P.O. Box 200400
Helena, MT 59620-0400

MEIC Bill Tracker:

Visit www.meic.org/bill-tracker. Our bill tracker provides you with up-to-date information on proposed legislation and the ability to contact sponsors, committee members, and the governor.



MEIC Lobbyists from left to right: Brian Fadie, Jim Jensen, Anne Hedges, Derf Johnson

CAPITOL MONITOR

Capitol Monitor is a publication of the Montana Environmental Information Center designed to keep members informed about environmental issues at the Montana legislature.

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HB 314 would allow, but not require, the Montana Public Service Commission (PSC) to initiate a “rate case” every three years. Rate cases are important because they help to ensure that customers are not gouged by utility companies. This bill is necessary because there is uncertainty about whether the PSC has the authority to initiate rate cases. The bill would clarify the PSC’s authority. NorthWestern Energy is currently going through a rate case process. However its previous rate case was 10 years ago – a far longer period of time than is typical.

SB 188: Revise Electricity Supply Resource Planning and Acquisition

Sponsor: Sen. Sue Malek, *D-Missoula*.

Status: *Hearing scheduled in the Senate Energy Committee on February 14th.*

Position: Support.

This bill would protect utility customers by reducing the likelihood of for-profit utilities (e.g., NorthWestern Energy) making unnecessary investments. It would make the long-term electricity resource planning process open to all parties – not just those invited by the utility. **SB 188** would require a competitive bidding process for new electricity resources, such as wind farms and power plants, and it would require a publicly available draft and public comment on requests for proposals for new resources. This increased transparency will protect customers from utilities rigging their requests for new resources to be geared toward more expensive resources such as gas.

HB 22: Revise Electricity Supply Resource Contract Length

Sponsor: Rep. Laurie Bishop, *D-Livingston*.

Status: *Heard in the House Energy Committee on February 13th. Awaiting a vote in that committee.*

Position: Support.

This bill would help small but competitive renewable resource developers by returning contract lengths for independent wind and solar “qualifying facilities” (QFs) to 25 years, the same length that they were before a harmful Public Service Commission ruling in 2017. 25 years is a standard contract length for power plants. NorthWestern itself has asked for and received guaranteed revenue recovery for its own power plants at lengths of 25, 30, 34, and 50 years. QFs are the largest driver of new wind and solar projects in Montana. They create jobs, tax revenue, and clean energy in communities across the state. Counties such as Stillwater, Big Horn, Musselshell, and Lewis and Clark all have large-scale solar facilities now, thanks to these projects.

Mark your Calendar and Attend our March 8th Citizen Lobby Day!

Join us for a Citizen Lobby Day on March 8th in Helena – an outstanding educational opportunity to engage with the Montana Legislature and make your voice heard. We will meet at St. Paul’s Methodist Church, 512 Logan Street, at 9:30 AM for an issue briefing and a “Lobbying 101” training session, then head to the Capitol to hear from, and have conversations with legislators about their focal issues. For more information, visit the Take Action - Events Page at www.meic.org.

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