

Public consultation was inadequate

Edmonton Journal, December 21, 2009

Re: "Province keeps open nuclear option; Government-commissioned survey shows majority of Albertans opposed," The Journal, Dec. 15.

Once again, we see a fence riding from Energy Minister Mel Knight. However, it is not truly fence riding, when you add up all the pronuclear decisions the government has made.

For example, providing Albertans with an "expert" panel that was all pro-nuclear and did not include a physician or biologist. And there was the voluntary online poll, with its biased questions. There was no clear question like "Are you in favour of nuclear power?"

In Saskatchewan, the government held public meetings on nuclear power which were attended by 2,600 people -- 80 per cent of whom opposed nuclear power. These meetings were held last July and August. Imagine -- a government that actually solicited real opinions from its citizens.

Last week, Knight announced that, after a telephone survey of 1,024 Albertans in July which found most Albertans opposed, the government would consider nuclear power proposals on a case-by-case basis.

Alberta's population is three times that of Saskatchewan, yet the government here sought the opinion of only half as many residents as Saskatchewan did.

The Alberta government did a poor job of soliciting public opinion. It seems cowardly for a government that has been in power for 38 years.

Nuclear power has a poor reputation in Ontario. It has cost Ontario taxpayers billions of dollars in subsidies. Some reactors have never worked, even after huge monetary investments from taxpayers.

There is no repository for nuclear waste in Canada. Uranium supplies are limited. Water use by CANDU reactors is high and in Alberta there is already concern about our water supply.

Nuclear plants give off emissions. Lake Ontario has three times more tritium in its water than to Lake Superior. The concentrations continue to rise. Tritium -- radioactive hydrogen -- easily joins with water molecules and cannot be filtered out. We can inhale, ingest and absorb tritium.

In northern Alberta, there is farmland near the proposed Peace River site, so radioactivity will easily enter the food chain. The Peace arch, where the plant is proposed, is known by geologists to be unstable. The energy produced by the plant there will far exceed Alberta's demands.

Why are no other options being considered?

Nuclear power does produce less CO₂ than coal power plants. But it is not clean energy. If a plant is built, we will be leaving waste for future generations to deal with. If the plant is successful, it will run for 40 years. Then it will simply be a large piece of nuclear waste itself.

When do the environment and human health issues matter more than industry or big business or the economy?

Although I am not surprised, I am disappointed with Knight's announcement. Alberta does not need nuclear energy, but the government has made up its mind that Alberta should have nuclear power.

The weak effort to solicit Albertans' opinions shows they have no regard for citizens' wishes and do not care that two other provinces -- B.C. and Saskatchewan -- have a moratorium on nuclear power. They also do not look at the history of this industry in Ontario, or in the world.

And no matter how reckless or out of touch this Conservative government is, we keep voting them back in.

Denise Wilson, Grande Prairie