SB 379: Billion dollar giveaway to NorthWestern

SB 379, introduced by Sen. Steve Fitzpatrick (R-Great Falls), would put NorthWestern Energy (NWE) customers on the hook for the business costs and risks associated with the aging Colstrip power plant, including operations, maintenance, repairs, replacement power, closure, and cleanup. It would also prevent the Public Service Commission (PSC) from doing its job to protect the public from excessive costs and bad business decisions, allowing NorthWestern to stick it to the ratepayers and line its own pockets.

At Northern Plains, we believe that everyday Montanans have the power to stand up to big corporations and fight for what is just and fair. We believe that a power company should work for its customers, not the other way around.

What HB 379 does:

- Allows NWE to charge customers for an increased ownership share in Colstrip without any oversight. These costs could surpass $1.9 billion total, and a $700/year price tag for individual customers.
- Forces NorthWestern customers to automatically pay for the closure, cleanup, replacement power, and undepreciated value of Colstrip going forward, whether the plant stays open or not.
- Turns a century of utility law on its head, inhibits public oversight and evidence-based decision making, and puts NWE in the driver’s seat.
- Gives NWE all the profits while guaranteeing we're saddled with the risk.

“[SB 379] dismantles the traditional balance between risk and reward...This shifts all of the risk to the utility’s customers, while guaranteeing that the utility’s stakeholders will receive reward.”- Robin Arnold, PSC staff

Comments should urge legislators to:

- Vote NO on SB 379 on behalf of all NorthWestern Energy ratepayers in MT.
- Find your legislator
- Leave a message
- Call the legislative switchboard (406) 444-4800*

*Note, the legislative switchboard will be closed for Easter break from 4/2 – 4/5.

Other relevant points:

- SB 379 is bad for consumers and bad for business in MT.
- SB 379 guarantees a monopoly company’s profit at the expense of everyday customers, raising all of our bills by hundreds of dollars a year.
- SB 379 goes against Montana values of accountability, transparency, and taking responsibility for your actions.
- SB 379 creates an unfair business environment by changing the laws for ONE company and ONE power source. It’s the government picking winners and losers.
- The Public Service Commission voted unanimously (5-0) to oppose this bill.
- NorthWestern tried a similar bill in 2019, and failed due to bipartisan opposition.
- This bill in no way “saves” Colstrip as purported. In fact, it could incentivize early Colstrip closure because NorthWestern is guaranteed to recoup its investments from customers no matter when it shuts the plant (meaning customers would pay for a power plant no longer producing energy). It’s about subsidizing a monopoly corporation - privatizing profits and socializing risk.