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In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ALBERTA BILL 46 AIMS TO REMOVE DEMOCRATIC PUBLIC SAFEGUARDS

The Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (AEUB) is hoping to avoid court action – and ultimately, accountability - by declaring nearly three years of hearings to be the equivalent of a “mistrial”, says Jan Slomp, Alberta Coordinator of the National Farmers Union (NFU).

In addition, the impending passage of Bill 46, the *Alberta Utilities Commission Act*, would further restrict landowners’ legal rights when it comes to negotiating with energy companies, he stated.

Slomp, a dairy farmer from Rimbey, Alberta, is one of hundreds of landowners directly affected by a proposed 500 KV AltaLink electrical transmission line which would be used to export electricity to the US market. For the past three years, the AEUB – which is supposed to be an independent regulatory body responsible for protecting the public interest - has conducted a series of controversial public hearings on the project. Landowners critical of the project accused the AEUB of bias in favour of AltaLink – an accusation that was proved correct when the provincial regulator admitted hiring private investors to spy on law-abiding citizens.

In late September, AEUB Chair William Tilleman cancelled the hearing process. But while this appears on the surface to be a victory for landowners, there are potentially bigger problems on the horizon in the form of Bill 46.

AltaLink is on record as stating it would submit a new application for the project once Bill 46 is passed so the process will be completed in six months.

Slomp said Bill 46 is a piece of “draconian” legislation that would effectively prevent the majority of Albertans from meaningful democratic input into decisions regarding energy developments – even when such developments encroach on their own land use.

“This legislation would effectively eliminate the very process which uncovered all the wrong-doings of the AEUB,” he stated.

Bill 46 would:

1. Restrict the ability of landowners to hire outside legal counsel when intervening in regulatory hearings;

2. be made retroactive to June 1, 2003. This would enable the regulatory agency to circumvent the courts in dealing with present and past misdeeds and failures of the AEUB to respect the rights of landowners;

3. remove the requirement that the regulatory body provide public notice or hold a hearing regarding any of its decisions;

4. prevent landowners and consumers from making verbal representations, even if a hearing is held.

Slomp said the Alberta government's efforts to push through Bill 46 will do nothing to restore public confidence in the provincial regulatory body. He called on the government to withdraw the legislation and bring greater accountability to the AEUB.

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