

Power fiasco demands judicial inquiry

Re: "Never-built line could hike bills; Consumers asked to pay \$35 million for cancelled project," *The Journal*, May 8.

Alberta Electric System Operator (AESO) has asked the Alberta Utilities Commission to force the Alberta public to reimburse \$35 million for the costs AltaLink incurred during the 2007 500-kilovolt transmission line hearings.

What costs did AltaLink incur in 2007? The majority of engineering costs for the transmission line were incurred AltaLink in the 2004 "needs" hearing process. After the need for a 500-kilovolt transmission line was approved by the EUB, the EUB reimbursed AltaLink for its costs in Decision 2005-037.

In fact, in Decision 2005-037 the EUB wrote: "The AESO claimed \$262,195.13 with respect to its participation in the proceeding. Of that amount, \$96,989.00 related to legal fees, \$38,072.53 related to consulting fees, and the remainder related to disbursements.

"AltaLink claimed \$204,500.03 with respect to its participation in the proceeding. Of that amount, \$172,732.00 related to legal fees, \$19,155.00 related to consulting fees, and \$12,613.03 related to disbursements. AltaLink participated in the pre-hearing meeting, prepared written submissions, IRs, and answers to IRs, cross-examined the City of Calgary (Calgary) and IPCAA/ADC, and provided argument at the proceeding. The board considers that AltaLink was one of the major participants in the proceeding."

The "needs" hearing determined the size of the line, and where the line was going to be placed in the west corridor. The size of the line dictated the size and type of the conductor, which dictated the size and type of towers.

After the "needs" hearing, there was little left for AltaLink's engineers to do. All that remained was for AltaLink's engineers to space the towers apart (on a piece of paper), in a straight line, and count the total



JOHN LUCAS, THE JOURNAL, FILE

Anti-oilsands activists joined a June 2007 protest in Rimbey by landowners unhappy about a proposed 500-kilovolt power transmission line.

number of towers. It is reasonable to believe that AltaLink's engineers should be able to count approximately 300 towers for considerably less than \$35 million.

Surely, Borden Ladner and Gervais (BLG), AltaLink's lawyers, didn't charge \$35 million in legal fees. After all, AESO and AltaLink's combined legal expenses only totalled to less than \$500,000 for the "needs" hearing, and the total 2007 legal costs incurred for all 32 parties involved (each represented by individual lawyers and consultants), amounted to less than \$1.9 million. Ralph Klein and the former EUB chairman, Neil McCrank, who coincidentally oversaw the approval of the transmission line, who both now work for BLG—could they be worth \$35 million?

What the public needs is a full independent judicial inquiry into this debacle.

Joe Anglin, Rimbey

This article filled a gap that needed to be filled. I tried to get this information for months without success. I think the provincial government owes the people of Alberta an apology for its actions in this matter.

Greg Wyborn, Grande Prairie

A trend emerges

Re: "Never-built power line could hike bills, consumers asked to pay \$35 million for cancelled project," May 8 and "Destruction of aging hospitals premature; Lack of capacity after the fact forced Calgary to turn to private clinics," May 9.

So, the government wants to collect the \$35 million for a power line that was derailed by a spy scandal by charging consumers. What else is new? Have you looked at your electricity and gas billings lately? My last bill had 17 charges, most of which were confusing and not adequately explained. What's one more charge in the scheme of things?

I recall vividly the destruction of the General Hospital in Calgary and the opposition to what the government was doing to health care. I recall marching with my family and 15,000 people in Millwoods to stop the closure of the Grey Nuns. Since the mid-1990s, our health-care system has continued to deteriorate and the only winners were the politicians and fat cats who ran the system into the ground, ultimately leaving with their million-dollar pensions, bonuses and severance entitlements.

What positive things have the Tories done for Albertans Peter Lougheed left office? The health-care system is in shambles; electricity and natural gas deregulation are an abomination; education is underfunded; the Heritage Fund is going nowhere; seniors are under attack by their own government and almost one-third of our citizens live below the poverty line.

Albertans are long suffering, willing to put up with just about anything from their politicians who ignore them once in office. What is so amazing is that, come the next election, the Tories will be returned to power.

Only in Alberta.

S. Rideout, Edmonton