

AltaLink sale raises questions

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As I went cycling “around the block” this evening in the country west of Innisfail, I was affronted by the sight of hurriedly erected transmission towers, part of the Western Alberta Transmission Line (WATL) line on our farmland.

The line is being built by AltaLink, a company completely owned and driven by Quebec-based engineering company SNC Lavalin, known for their bribery, kickbacks and money laundering in co-operation with foreign dictators like the Gadhafi regime.

AltaLink had just served our family two right-of-entry orders just weeks before. I have a very personal stake in this illegitimate enterprise as it directly affects my family’s long-term plan to build a new home in the AUC-dictated right-of-way. We have been harassed by landmen, intimidated through AltaLink’s draconian so-called ‘consultation,’ negotiation and routing practices, and pushed aside and ignored by the AUC, Surface Rights Board, and our government through this whole wearisome process. A process which has been stacked against property owners and the Alberta public from the very beginning, with our government barring public discourse on this massive overbuild with Bill 50.

Now within the last week, I read of the \$3.24-billion dollar sale of AltaLink to Warren Buffet’s company, Berkshire Hathaway, whose subsidiary MidAmerican Transmission (recently renamed Berkshire Hathaway Energy) is the largest power transmission company in the Midwest United States.

With this deal, SNC Lavalin effectively carries off \$3.24 billion to Quebec from the bottom line of Alberta industry and business. In addition, Alberta taxpayers and ratepayers are footing the bill for the unprecedented recent growth of AltaLink. The expansion of the Alberta transmission infrastructure, enforced through government legislation, has been a windfall to SNC Lavalin. AltaLink is able to own lines paid for by the ratepayer and sole source the design and construction of these new lines to SNC. It is a recipe for overbuilding and overspending.

As part of the AltaLink sale, SNC Lavalin is also guaranteed significant engineering design and construction contracts within the MidAmerican Grid. Should a company plagued by

scandal, bribes and underhanded dealing, here and abroad, be rewarded for their manipulation of the people of Alberta and their government in such a way?

AltaLink and our provincial government have maintained that the WATL is part of Alberta's future 'critical infrastructure' and not for the export of bulk power to the U.S. But now the game plan becomes quite obvious with the sale of Albertan's 'critical infrastructure' to a U.S. transmission giant.

What's the game? To sell power into the U.S. grid at the highest price possible and get Albertans to pay for the building of it.

Throughout the entire continental U.S., there are only five significant HVDC transmission lines. Yet here we are building two parallel lines, north to south, within the province, putting the scale of the 'upgrade' into perspective.

Also, in this age of distributed power generation, what is the province doing approving expansion of transmission lines for coal-powered generators when the province has a ubiquitous supply of natural gas and other resources?

Plans are afoot for building natural gas generating stations at existing coal-powered generating sites as the coal generating units will be retired by 2020. Natural gas generation could literally be built anywhere within the province without significant transmission upgrades, closer to the need, providing a more robust local energy economy.

An American-focused company will control the majority of Alberta's 'critical infrastructure' and, in a deregulated market, will sell to the highest bidder. This will drive electricity prices up dramatically within the province when Albertans are competing in an international market for our locally produced power.

We have already seen the tip of the iceberg in the proclivities of the likes of TransAlta, manipulating the electricity market by arranging shutdown of their generating facilities to drive up peak rates. The new infrastructure only benefits the likes of companies like these, and is a detriment to the Alberta public who pays for its construction and, in the long term, with significantly higher electricity costs.

We are one holdouts, who have not signed an agreement with AltaLink, in spite of the enormous pressure that often feels like trying to stop a speeding locomotive. We are

frustrated with the apparent apathy and collusion in the system that is supposed to be there to look out for the average Albertan.

We are currently challenging in the courts the Alberta government's right to make unilateral decisions and to bar any public discussion when it comes to expansion of transmission lines into interprovincial and international markets, which these transmission lines most certainly are, in spite of what we have been told.

I would like to encourage readers to think about the implications of the sale of AltaLink. For us Albertans, \$3.24 billion in homegrown growth will leave our economy for Quebec and dictators pockets unknown and our future electricity costs hang in the balance as we will have to compete on a global market for our own power. Also please consider the ramifications of handing over our 'critical infrastructure' to an American company.

I can't see how the people of Alberta would be anything more than an afterthought to those striving towards their primary objective of making money for Warren Buffet.

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