

Coal industry fighting Alberta plans to phase out power plants



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Published on: March 31, 2016 | Last Updated: March 31, 2016 4:29 PM MDT

The Coal Association of Canada launched a campaign Thursday to fight Alberta's plan to phase out coal-fired electricity generation.

The NDP government announced last year it wants to retire 18 coal-fired power plants by 2030 as part of the province's climate change strategy to reduce carbon emissions.

The plan will cost the province 10,000 jobs, hurt communities where the plants are located and boost electricity prices, coal association president Robin Campbell said.

"They should rethink the plan. We're not here to contest climate change, we're not here to contest greenhouse gas (emissions). We're here to say coal has a future."

Campbell, a former Conservative MLA who served as finance minister and minister of environment and sustainable resource development, said the new rules are making companies unwilling to invest in Alberta power generation.

He predicted some plants will start to close as soon as 2018, when a \$30-per-tonne levy on carbon dioxide emissions is set to begin.

Capital Power Corp., however, indicated it will continue running its coal fleet until 2030 based on the proposed climate change plan.

"Capital Power remains committed to operating in the Alberta market. We support government action on carbon pricing, and we are working with the government of Alberta to support effective implementation of the climate leadership plan," spokesperson Michael Sheehan said.

Representatives from other large power companies, TransAlta Corp. and Atco Ltd., were not immediately available to comment on whether they would scale back or shut down their facilities.

University of Alberta economics professor Andrew Leach, who chaired the panel providing climate change policy recommendations to the government, said the possibility that some coal-fired power plants would shut down early was flagged in his panel's report.

“The change in policy in 2018 will change the economics of running a coal-fired power plant,” Leach said. Still, he added, “you’re not going to see 6,000 megawatts drop off the market.”

Campbell, who wants more details about the government’s climate leadership plan, said money would be better spent developing clean-coal technology than paying firms to close their plants early.

China, India and other countries are still building coal plants to ensure their billions of citizens have access to electricity, he said.

“We’re saying let’s continue to improve our emissions, let’s become world leaders and let’s help countries that will continue to burn fossil fuels.”

He said the retail price of electricity in the province would triple as a result of the climate change policies and carbon taxes.

But Leach and Premier Rachel Notley rejected that idea.

“I think they are making up numbers at this point,” Notley told reporters.

With files from the National Post

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