

# CALGARY HERALD

## **Alberta's proposed energy bill would drive wedge between landowners, industry: Wildrose**

By Darcy Henton, Calgary Herald November 6, 2012



**Alberta Wildrose Leader Danielle Smith said Monday her party will propose 12 amendments to the Responsible Energy Development Act.**

**Photograph by: Stuart Gradon , Calgary Herald**

EDMONTON — The Redford government's proposed one-stop energy regulator bill pits landowners against oil and gas developers and needs significant changes before it will win support from Alberta's Official Opposition, Wildrose Leader Danielle Smith said Monday.

Smith said Monday her party will propose 12 amendments to the Responsible Energy Development Act to ensure it protects landowners, communities and the environment and removes tensions between industry and landowners.

The Wildrose will push the governing Tories to send the Bill 2 to a standing all-party committee on resource development to fix the flaws in the legislation she called a "Franken-bill" in the Assembly last week.

"We welcome the underlying intentions of this legislation," she said. "We believe a one-stop shop for approving resource development is a good idea, but the foundation of that idea needs some work."

She said that as it is written, Bill 2 is taking Albertans down the same path as controversial land bills — Bill 19, Bill 36 and Bill 50 — that had to be sent back to the House for amendments.

“We will have landowners who will be going to town hall meetings and they will be raising these concerns publicly as well as in the media about their rights not being respected,” she said. “And why would we go through that? What I am worried about is if you create an attitude of combat or hostility between these two key players, it is actually going to make it harder for the energy industry to be able to get their land agent out there negotiating access.”

Smith said the government hasn’t learned its lessons from the earlier land bills that critics say eroded landowners rights while setting aside land for development of public projects and power transmission lines.

“We sincerely hope that the premier and the energy minister will be open-minded about slowing this whole process down,” Smith said. “We simply cannot keep making laws haphazardly and ending up back here years down the road trying to fix the messes that they create. This government’s sloppy approach to legislating has become one of its defining characteristics.”

Smith said the bill is clearly needed to streamline Alberta’s regulatory process because Alberta has plummeted dramatically in its standing in energy investment surveys because of its red tape. She gave examples where Saskatchewan made regulatory changes for companies in hours or days while it took Alberta months and years to make the same changes for the same companies.

The Wildrose leader said her party will seek references in the bill to restore the need for projects to be in the public interest “having regard to the social and economic effects of the project and the effects of the project on the environment.”

It wants to restore external appeals to the Environmental Appeal Board that have been killed in Bill 2, restore notification of landowners and notification of hearings and ensure there is transparency and accountability in decisions, she said. The Wildrose seeks to have an all-party committee, rather than cabinet, choose the chief commissioner of the new regulatory body and it wants an amendment to establish 180-day timeline for decisions. It also wants an all-party committee to choose the regulator’s board of directors to represent landowners, the environment and industry.

Liberal MLA Kent Hehr called Bill 2 “a disappointing effort” that needs significant improvements.

“I am really disappointed in this bill and, frankly, unless some of these amendments go through, I don’t think you will see any groups out there happy with it,” he said.

Energy Minister Ken Hughes said the government is bringing in the changes to create a more competitive process for applicants, “but also we’re not prepared to compromise on environmental quality one iota.”

He said the bill gives landowners more rights than current legislation.

NDP critic Rachel Notley said the NDP are preparing eight amendments to the bill.

“We have a lot of concern with what this act does,” she said. It’s going to mean that we rush to approval and we eliminate and minimize oversight by the public at a time when we desperately need it.”

Notley said First Nations should be concerned the new regulator may avoid consulting with them on new energy developments.

“We know that biodiversity is at risk — about 50 per cent of it — if we go ahead with what is currently planned on the books. That is a substantial threat to the viability and the future of every aboriginal community in the Lower Athabasca Region.”

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