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Premier Redford says critics of energy regulation bill are 'fear mongering'

Wildrose: Bill 2, the Responsible Energy Development Act, lacks protection

By Darcy Henton, Calgary Herald November 16, 2012



Landowners are worried about their rights under Bill 2, the Responsible Energy Development Act.

Photograph by: Ted Rhodes , Calgary Herald

EDMONTON — Opponents of Alberta’s one-stop energy development regulator bill are “fear mongering” when they claim the proposed legislation strips away the rights of landowners, Premier Alison Redford told rural politicians Thursday.

Redford said Bill 2, the Responsible Energy Development Act, will empower landowners and strengthen their participation rights when they deal with oil and gas companies that seek to drill on their land.

“We’ve heard an awful lot of misinformation about property rights and we’ve heard an awful lot of fear mongering,” she told the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties. “I am here today to tell you the truth.”

“The criticism you’re going to hear about this legislation comes from a place of not understanding how significantly we’re transforming the regulatory process to ensure that industry and landowners are able to balance their interests and allow economic development in this province — and that is our commitment as your government,” she told the applauding crowd.

While Redford didn't mention the fear mongers by name, it appeared to be a reference to the Wildrose party, which ignited public protest before the spring election over four previous bills it claimed eroded property rights.

But Wildrose Leader Danielle Smith said Thursday the controversial Bill 2, which merges six conservation acts, has been assailed by academics, lawyers and land rights groups for stripping away rights entrenched in the initial acts.

She accused Redford of not reading her own legislation.

“We're not the creators of the problem. We're just reflecting what we're hearing from stakeholders and the landowner community about rights that they have today that are going to be stripped out under Bill 2 when it passes and becomes law,” Smith said. “These are issues that are going to ultimately cause problems on the front line in the negotiations between energy companies and landowners.”

The Wildrose has proposed 13 amendments to address landowner concerns. Smith said landowners see the legislation as being similar to Bills 19, 36, 24, and 50 which were eventually amended or repealed because of public concerns.

“We're just trying to stop them from making the same mistake again and creating unnecessary conflict and strife in the relationship between our energy companies and our landowners,” said Smith. “I would say: ‘Don't shoot the messenger.’ ”

The Wildrose leader called on the government to work with the opposition parties to improve the legislation.

Three University of Calgary law professors and the Environmental Law Centre in Edmonton have written articles criticizing the bill for its retraction of landowner rights, and one landowner group fears that the bill could spark violence in the oil patch if it passes in the present form.

Energy Minister Ken Hughes has already made 15 amendments to the bill, which has passed second reading in the Alberta legislature.

Landowners have called the changes by the minister “window-dressing” and are demanding the restoration of outside appeals of decisions made by the regulator.

For more info and articles, go to website: AlbertaLandownersCouncil.com