



Oppose Bill Jeopardizing Montana's Rooftop Solar Industry

HB 448 was a good solar bill until it was hijacked by NorthWestern Energy

OPPOSE HB 448 (Representative Kassmier)

- HB 448 was originally intended to make it easier for Montana's small businesses, schools, libraries, and farmers and ranchers to produce their own energy by increasing the cap on the size of rooftop solar systems. It passed through the House and then... NorthWestern Energy hijacked HB 448 in the Senate Energy committee, introducing amendments that change the purpose of the bill.
- NorthWestern's amendments now require the Public Service Commission (PSC) to change rates for all rooftop solar customers, taking away the ability for the PSC to create "just and reasonable" rates, one of the primary purposes of the regulatory body.
- **This is another attack by Montana's monopoly utility on Montanans who chose to invest in rooftop solar to produce their own energy.**
- Another amendment **takes jobs away from the solar professionals working in this small industry.** This requirement was not written with input from the trained, experienced solar professionals who are actually out installing these systems.
- The bill also forces all rooftop solar customers – including individual households, churches, libraries, farmers and ranchers, schools – to hire a full-time, onsite electrician with the sole job of standing by in case there's an outage and acting as a liaison between the utility and the solar customer.
- According to Andrew Valainis, executive director of Montana Renewable Energy Association in a [recent Op-Ed](#): "The purpose of the original bill was to create jobs in Montana's solar industry. As amended, it now takes operational and maintenance tasks and forces the solar owner to hire someone who didn't install the system and may not even have training on solar installation and equipment...House Bill 448 would have saved Montanans money and created jobs in Montana's solar industry. Instead, it will make it more difficult to save money with solar, take jobs away from solar professionals, and allow Northwestern to put its grip around the Public Service Commission and Legislature."

The Latest in a Long History of Corporate Overreach by NorthWestern Energy

The amendment to this bill would make rooftop solar less viable in Montana, much like HB 359, a bill written by NorthWestern Energy introduced earlier this session that the bill sponsor was forced to withdraw after widespread public outcry. Hijacking HB 448 is yet another attempt by the company to bend the Legislature and the Montana Public Service Commission to its will.

We're seeing a slurry of NorthWestern Energy-sponsored bills this legislative session as the company continues its history of aggressive interference in the Montana Legislature. NorthWestern Energy (NWE) is a for-profit company with a guaranteed monopoly over supplying energy to most of Western Montana. This company plays a key role in determining Montana's energy supply mix and energy future. NorthWestern Energy stands out in comparison with many other utilities across the country for its drive to build new fossil fuel plants in the middle of a climate emergency.

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