



SIERRA CLUB

MONTANA CHAPTER

Oppose Bill Undermining the Montana Consumer Counsel

SB 84 is Another Anti-Consumer Bill that Would Benefit NorthWestern Energy At the Expense of Montanans

OPPOSE SB 84 (Sponsor: Senator Ankney)

- **SB 84 could result in higher costs for Montana utility customers if the Montana Consumer Counsel (MCC) is prevented from doing its constitutionally mandated job.**
- The MCC is charged with protecting the interests of Montanans before the Public Service Commission (PSC) to ensure that utility customers aren't overcharged by monopoly utilities it is charged with regulating, like NorthWestern Energy. The MCC is often the only entity that participates in PSC proceedings in which a utility requests the ability to increase the rates of utility customers.
- The MCC is a very small office that hires experts and consultants to help review utility requests and argue for consumer protections on a wide range of issues including electricity, gas, solid waste, water supply, and more. Without MCC expertise and involvement the PSC often does not have the record it needs to legally deny utility requests to raise rates.
- SB 84, "Generally revise consumer committee laws," **would make it more difficult for the MCC to actually protect consumers.** The bill is problematic for several reasons:
 - It would remove ethical conflicts for legislators overseeing decisions regarding whether MCC can hire experts to review monopoly utility filings.
 - It ties the ability of MCC to hire experts and consultants to the Energy and Telecommunications Interim Committee. This Committee doesn't meet for nine months before nor during legislative sessions, making it difficult for MCC to hire experts on dockets that are occurring in that timeframe.
 - MCC is supposed to be an independent body free from political interference. This bill, combined with bills to change the balance of interim committees, will undermine the political neutrality of the MCC.

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

We're seeing a slurry of bills aimed at weakening regulations on and affecting NorthWestern Energy this legislative session as the company continues its history of aggressive interference in the Montana Legislature. 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. NWE 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. In Montana, however, NWE has somehow managed to preserve a middling reputation, and continues to get away with launching shameless attacks on the laws and regulations that keep the company in check.