



## Oppose NorthWestern Energy's Corporate Bailout Bill

SB 379 is an outrageous attempt by a monopoly utility to gouge Montanans

### OPPOSE SB 379 (Senator Fitzpatrick)

- This bill could force Montanan energy ratepayers to pay [approximately \\$1.9 billion](#) to keep Colstrip Unit 4 operating indefinitely, including an additional guaranteed profit for NorthWestern Energy (NWE). This includes an allowable increase of approximately \$700/ year in energy bills for schools, hospitals, businesses, and individual homes throughout most of Montana in order to line the pockets of shareholders and executives and prop up a 35-year-old coal-fired power plant.
- SB 379, written primarily by NorthWestern Energy, also constrains the Public Service Commission (PSC) from providing oversight of NWE's expenditures related to the 35-year-old Colstrip power plant, effectively eliminating protections for the company's energy ratepayers in the process. This includes charging customers for future environmental cleanup costs shareholders would previously have had to pay and forcing customers to pay for any decisions NWE chooses to make regarding Unit 4, regardless of how imprudent or costly the decision might be.
- This bill would essentially give NorthWestern a [blank check paid for by customers](#) regarding:
  - Operations, maintenance, and repairs of Colstrip Unit 4;
  - Buying replacement power if the plant is shut down for maintenance and/or lack of compliance with environmental protections;
  - Buying more shares of the plant; and
  - Any stranded costs of additional shares of the plant acquired after the bill is signed.
- On March 23, the PSC voted unanimously to oppose SB 379. Said Commissioner O'Donnell, a Billings Republican: "The bill, it looks like, is entirely a wish list for NorthWestern Energy... it's a complete abrogation of responsibility for NorthWestern shareholders and the transfer of all liabilities to ratepayers. And I find that to be incredibly egregious."
  - Wrote PSC staff in [their initial analysis of SB 379](#): "The bill dismantles the regulatory balance between NorthWestern and its customers by guaranteeing investment returns to the utility while transferring all risk to ratepayers. SB 379 singles out a particular utility and a particular generation resource, then mandates that a deliberative and evidence-based process may not be used in the allocation of cost responsibility and determination of rates for that resource."
  - In response to a recent amendment on the bill approved by the Senate Energy Committee, the PSC staff released a [second staff memo](#) to make it clear that the amendment does very little to resolve multiple major concerns about this bill, returning a minimal amount of regulatory authority to the PSC but still dramatically restricting the scrutiny the PSC can apply to Unit 4.

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

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 — **and this is the worst energy bill of the 2021 session.** 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 and brazen attempts to dismantle regulations that keep the company in check.

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