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From the Desk of
Senator Ted Ferrioli

Oregon Gov. Muzzled Regulators Critical Of Anti-Coal Bill

Posted By [Chris White](#) On 5:24 PM 02/17/2016 In | [No Comments](#)

Oregon utility regulators say environmental groups, utility companies and renewable-energy activists froze them out of discussions about legislation that would permanently push coal out of the state.

Members of the Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) also complained that, along with being phased out of the discussions, their concerns were muzzled by Gov. Kate Brown's office, according to internal [emails obtained by The Oregonian](#).

The electronic emails indicate the commission viewed the bill with disdain, suggesting it would be a boon for public utility companies, terrible for consumers and ultimately a raw deal for the environment.

"This bill is absolute crap... a shell game that will result in no actual emissions reductions and higher rates for Oregon customers," John Savage, the Oregon PUC commissioner, said. "And then the utilities get to stuff our decisions they didn't like down our throats."

He added: "And the governor's office thinks we have the gall to even critique the damn thing and are questioning who we are and what we do."

The environmentalist-backed bill, also called the Clean Electricity and Coal Transition Plan by its supporters, would completely phase coal out of Oregon, ultimately replacing it with renewable energy, as well as forbid natural gas from helping to fill the void made by coal's absence.

It also mandates utility companies stop paying for electricity emanating from out-of-state coal power plants by 2030.

The commission's biggest concern is that the plan would cost consumers dearly but would do little to reduce carbon emissions, primarily because out-of-state coal plants would continue running at full capacity even as consumers are forced to pay more for renewable energy.

Environmentalists [have promised to remove proposed ballot initiatives](#) if the legislature passes the bill.

Oregon's residential ratepayer advocate and self-styled independent arbiter, the Citizen's Utility Board, was invited to the discussions and gave the deal its blessing.

Critics argued the board is anything but independent, as the CUB has voiced support for the green agenda and supposedly sidled up next to environmental and renewable groups in the past.

Commission chair Susan Ackerman told her policy chief adviser, Jason Eisdorfer, according to the internal emails, that the group's "financial heft" essentially exempts the group from representing consumers.

The bill's supporters issued a press release in early January cheering the agreement.

Ackerman received a cold reply after telling Brown's office of the commission's decision to publicly comment on the bill.

"Please hold off providing comment until we discuss further here," Ruchi Sadhir, the governor's energy policy adviser, replied. "Thanks!"

The reply did not go over well with Savage. "Well, it looks like we're going to be silenced on the whole thing," he told the former PUC commissioner in the internal emails. "I put together a list of talking points for a talk with the Oregonian but we were told we couldn't talk."

"We are getting steam rolled," Stephen Bloom, another commissioner, later told Eisdorfer.

The controversial energy bill is also causing angst between Republican and Democratic legislatures as well. In fact, Republican critics requested the bill be read, aloud, in front of Oregon's legislature before a vote is rendered.

"The bill applies to about two-thirds of the power use in Oregon ... it effects about 1.4 million Oregonians," Republican Rep. Cliff Bentz told reporters Wednesday.

He added: "The bill is exceedingly complex, and I'll tell you that in order for me to understand the bill – and I still don't – I called some of my friends in the utility business and talked to them about it at length and had them review it for me. There are parts of this bill that are great, there are others that are perfectly horrid."

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