

Will Wall's Government Respect Its Consultation Process?

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By Jim Harding

On September 15th Dan Perrins delivered his public consultations, report to Wall's government. In March, the Uranium Development Partnership (UDP) recommended that Saskatchewan develop nuclear power and create a nuclear waste dump. Growing public concern about UDP one-sidedness left the Sask Party government with no political alternative but to undertake a "public consultation process", which Perrins led from April to July. With 2,637 people in total attending thirteen public meetings, 1,275 written submissions and 61 stakeholder groups presenting, Energy and Resources Minister Boyd was right in calling it 'the broadest and most transparent public debate on uranium development ever undertaken in Saskatchewan'.

Perrins is to be congratulated for his methodic, direct reporting of the 2,263 "responses" he got to the UDP. But Wall's government, already on record as pronuclear, didn't hear what it wanted to hear; so, will it listen to Perrins? Perrins' Executive Summary speaks for itself. He found "the overwhelming response was that nuclear power generation should not be a choice for Saskatchewan". "The vast majority of responses were concerned about health and safety impacts of uranium development"; many "believed it is irresponsible for Saskatchewan people to commit to storing nuclear waste that may have implications for future generations." Perrins said "The vast majority supported Saskatchewan moving towards a greater focus on alternative energy sources," noting that "economic impacts - including employment - would be spread throughout the province, rather than focused in one area like with a nuclear power plant." He also noted, "Energy efficiency was thought to be good economically for the province and for individual households, less expensive for government, and good for the environment."

Perrins found "A large proportion of people wanted Saskatchewan to go ahead with a study on renewable sources of energy, funded to the same level as the UDP Report." He noted widespread "concerns around (UDP) partnership representation including the role of industry and the lack of representation from women and environmental groups". He stressed that the UDP process did not fulfill a "Duty to Consult process" with First Nations and Métis. Perrins continued, "The majority of responses dealing with the exploration and mining of uranium in the province did not support current or future activities in this area." The majority "are largely opposed to any upgrading, including enrichment, fuel fabrication, and all other forms of upgrading." Regarding nuclear medicine, Perrins noted "many people who expressed support for the production of medical isotopes stipulated it should occur without the use of nuclear fission." The nine recommendations to Wall are worth reading in detail. In a nutshell, in

the Conclusion to his Executive Summary, Perrins said, “time needs to be taken to ensure quality information is available, people are properly consulted and informed decisions are made.”

The *Regina Leader Post*'s September 16th editorial, predictably, downplayed the “overwhelming response” against nuclear power, suggesting it didn't necessarily represent “the entire Saskatchewan population.” No mention that, with much greater resources than the grass-roots, community-based groups participating, the nuclear industry and Chamber of Commerce launched a province-wide pronuclear letter writing campaign. Or, that even with all these solicited, pronuclear views accounted for by Perrins, opposition to nuclear power remained overwhelming - 84% of all responses. The editorial reiterates SaskPower's projected growth in electrical demand as if written in stone, and failed to mention that Perrins recommended that future consultations include sound information on “increased energy conservation efforts”. By attacking those who can't “escape the bounds of doctrinaire positions - on either side of the nuclear question”, the *Leader Post* tried to make itself the voice of reason; yet editorially it has resolutely held a pronuclear position, and consistently “reported” on and for the nuclear industry in a highly-biased way.

The *Leader Post* demonstrated its “reasoned approach” by supporting the government's interpretation of Perrins, Report as a “yellow light for its uranium development plans.” There have been a lot of jokes since Minister Boyd said Perrins, Report was “neither a green light nor a red light - it's more like a yellow light”. One joke asks “Why is it dangerous to get in a car that Boyd,s driving?”, answering, “because he doesn't know which light follows a yellow light”.

The Wall government may not have been sincere about public input when it initiated UDP consultations. It may have thought that, with Bruce Power's multi-million promotions, Chamber of Commerce backing, and skewing the UDP process towards nuclear expansion, the fix was in. Wall's government may have had no idea that Saskatchewan's grass-roots, including many who supported the Sask Party, was deeply concerned about the cozy relationship between the government and the nuclear industry.

Can we expect Wall's government to act differently after Perrins, report? It's not encouraging that, before Perrins finished, Premier Wall was end-running his own consultations, appealing to the Harper government for up to \$675 million of taxpayer's money for nuclear isotope production, using unnecessary fission technology that just happens to be useful for nuclear waste research. (In contrast, Manitoba, which bans nuclear wastes, applied to produce isotopes with a \$35 million cyclotron.) We can't celebrate that the Wall government initially only gave the Standing Committee on Crowns and Central Agencies from Oct. 6-13th to explore non-nuclear energy options, all behind closed doors; public

pressure has thankfully extended these. And it is not a good sign that Wall's government is cooperating with the industry-based Nuclear Waste Management Organizing (NWMO), which the UDP supported, in its search for a "willing" Saskatchewan community to take nuclear wastes from afar.

Perrins concluded the public wanted more balanced, accurate information on our energy options. We need to now convince the government that it, too, needs better information than it has been receiving and acting on, in its unflinching support of the nuclear industry.

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