



Tuesday, January 15, 2008

Michael Yackira
President, Sierra Pacific Resources
6100 Neil Road
Reno, NV 89511

Dear Mr. Yackira,

A matter has come to my attention that I believe demands your attention.

Last Monday (1/7/08) evening around 5:45 PM, I received a call at the Nevada Conservation League office. The caller was a young woman with a strong southern accent, and she claimed to be taking a national opinion poll about energy independence. Working on energy issues in Nevada, I was more than willing to answer her questions.

Unfortunately, it soon became apparent that I was not responding to a legitimate opinion survey, but rather to a biased, “push poll” – the sort of underhanded political tactic designed to push propaganda or to sow doubt in a seemingly legitimate and innocent way.

It was also clear that the poll was being done on behalf of the fossil fuel industry – or someone allied with it. The questions I was asked falsely implied that:

- Nevada’s positive moves toward energy independence were having an adverse affect on the economy; and that
- The best way for America to meet its energy needs would be through reliance on traditional fuels such as coal, rather than harnessing Nevada’s free and abundant natural solar, wind and geothermal energy resources.

I note that these talking points closely mirror the current advertising that the front group, “Americans for Balanced Energy Choices” has carpeted the state with recently.

For a moment, let’s set aside the irony that a conservation advocate was called for a pro-coal push poll. I think it’s outrageous that at a time when Nevadans are trying to decide which source of energy should be in Nevada’s future, they have to sort through several million dollars of propaganda underwritten by out-of-state coal interests.

While underhanded tactics such as push polling might be common in other states, Nevadans don’t appreciate being subjected to these deceptive practices. Given how tightly Sierra Pacific Resources (SPR) has allied itself with out-of-state coal interests, I ask that you, as a new and powerful arrival in this state, clarify what involvement you or SPR had in this underhanded tactic.

-CONTINUED-

Specifically:

1. Did you or others at Sierra Pacific Resources know that this push poll was being conducted?
2. If so, was my money, and that of other ratepayers, used to pay for this push poll, even partially? If so, how much was spent?
3. If you or SPR was involved with this poll, will you release to the public the full questionnaire? My organization will post the questionnaire you release on our website, so Nevadans can judge how above-board this push poll was.
4. Regardless of your or SPR's involvement, do you approve of push polling as a tactic to distribute this sort of propaganda? If not, will you denounce the use of any poll deployed for the purposes of affecting rather than measuring public opinion?

Ratepayers in Nevada – who, right now, have no choice in who supplies their electricity – are trying to make high-stakes choices about where our state's energy future lies. With over 300 days a year of sunshine and an abundance of wind and geothermal resources in our state, I know that coal interests desperately don't want us to develop our in-state renewable energy resources that would create twice the jobs and use a fraction of the water that coal plants will.

However, their desperation and money should not be a reason why the state should make bad choices. And, their power should not be a reason why you, as the new head of our monopoly utility, should be allying SPR with these interests.

I will assume for now that you knew nothing of this push poll. Being aware of what out-of-state special interests will stoop to in order to propagandize the use of coal, I hope you will distance yourself and Sierra Pacific Resources from their deceitful tactics and be honest with Nevadans about the real choices they have about our energy independence.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Scot Rutledge
Executive Director
Nevada Conservation League