

Thank you, Utility Commissioners, for coming to Spokane, so we can give you our perspectives on the potential merger of Avista with Hydro One.

In general I am open to that merger, but I do have some concerns related to Avista's partial ownership of the coal burning Colestrip Power Plant in Montana. This plant is the largest greenhouse gas emitter in the Western United States thereby adding to Global Warming which affects all of us and causing Climate Changes. Locally we experience that warming in more forest fires each summer. Acres of timber as well as some communities have gone up in smoke. The smoke and ash damage our lungs.

Coal ash ponds are another pollution issue that should have been prevented from the beginning. Eight hundred acres of ponds are now leaking toxic chemicals from the coal ash into the surrounding area. Regulations required that the ponds be lined, but for some reason Colestrip chose not to and bypassed these safety measures. As a result the local ground water is contaminated and dangerous to drink. Area ranchers and their livestock suffer. The same must be true for wildlife that drink from the local streams.

I am eager for Avista to relinquish ownership of that aging, polluting power plant. But I expect them to clean up their share of the damage to air and water before or while merging with Hydro One.

I read in your background information that Avista and Hydro One agreed to set aside 3 million dollars from shareholders to fund community development in Colstrip, Montana. I applaud that, but also hope that includes cleanup of the air and water pollution as well as remediation of the damage caused. That seems only fair. The shareholders benefitted over these many years while major costs of burning the coal were externalized onto the people of the Colstrip area. They suffer loss of health and of property value because of the pollution. The sooner such clean-up can happen, the better it will be for the people living there, although I would expect it to cost more like three hundred million dollars. Many of us here in Spokane, and elsewhere, have been seeing this as an issue of justice and have been urging Avista to push for the change. I hope it will come now.

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