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Organization:

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Initiative: Tongue River Railroad

Submission Text

Patrick Johnson

519 Third Street, Helena, Montana 59601 My name is Patrick Johnson. I was born and grew up in Sunburst, Montana, a small town up in the high line. I now live at 519 Third Street here in Helena. I mentioned my home town because 60 years later, after the closure of the refinery there, we're still dealing with the environmental consequences of that, including a gas flow that had a radically negative impact on people I grew up with, including members of my family. The Tongue River Railroad doesn't just affect the people in the state of Montana, let alone the people living in that part of our state. It affects everybody in this country, and indeed every part of the world.

There's no rational reason for the Surface Transportation board to make a public policy decision, and this is a policy decision, to approve the building of that railroad, no rational reason. While economics is not the focus of draft EIS, it's clear that from what we've heard today and what we've all read that Arch Coal Company is on the skids. There's no reason to believe among other things that they could float a construction bond, for example, to build the railroad. As a result of that, what's likely to happen is the Surface Transportation Board may indeed, and I hope that they don't, issue a permit to allow building the railroad, but Arch Coal will end up dropping the ball, and we the people, and other folks around the country, will be left holding the economic consequences of a failed construction project.

From a public policy point of view, it simply doesn't make sense to engage in the building of the Tongue River Railroad. We also have an obligation as citizens of the world to pay attention to what's going on in China. Others have very eloquently talked about the demise of coal, and I also believe that. The impact upon the citizens of Helena, indeed the people in Hood River, all across the railroad lines that would stem from the Tongue River Railroad are clear. There's nothing in a positive light to suggest that this railroad ought to be built. It simply doesn't make sense. What that leads me to believe is that if the Surface Transportation board does issue a feasible decision relative to building the railroad, it's pure politics. It's not good public policy; it's simply politics, which makes me question the integrity of the members of that board.

Thank you.