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Editor, *Whitehall Ledger*
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Dear Editor,

Please let us share why we so gratefully support the Jefferson County Commission in asserting the county's right to full local coordination with Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in planning for the proposed Mountain States Transmission Intertie (MSTI).

Now we know that DEQ and BLM have reacted to justified outrage in Butte by flipping the "preferred route" of MSTI over from Butte and I-15 to the Jefferson Valley. This choice by DEQ and BLM, with the apparent consent of Governor Schweitzer, not only attempts to *justify* MSTI in Whitehall, but *doubles* MSTI's footprint in our community. Now greater Whitehall would be surrounded on two sides with some 250 fourteen-story towers.

How did greater Whitehall come to bear such a disproportionate share of MSTI's damages? This is what happened. Facing stiff opposition in Butte that called for MSTI to be moved to public lands, the DEQ and BLM hastily developed a new Jefferson Valley option, which they labeled "2C" and misleadingly called a "public land option," even though it remained primarily on private land throughout Jefferson County. Zigzagging amateurishly through grazing land, irrigated land, conservation easements, and residential areas, this eleventh hour option was revealed on October 15, 2009, with neither the legal necessity of coordinating with Jefferson County nor the common courtesy of notifying the landowners who now faced condemnation.

Since then, DEQ and BLM have delayed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), buying time for consultants to rearrange the facts around the political decision to target Jefferson Valley with even more MSTI. Thankfully, our Jefferson County Commissioners smelled a rat, forced into public view the "draft draft" EIS, and asserted the County's right to coordinate with the agencies in planning MSTI. Full local coordination is only reasonable, especially now that Jefferson County and Jefferson Valley bear the MSTI burden, having relieved some other communities of the same.

Whatever the consultants say (and they are paid with NorthWestern's money), it is obvious to anyone that a brand new corridor, condemned through green fields of valleys from Townsend to Dillon, will not be environmentally preferable to an already federally designated, already heavily impacted energy corridor that truly lies on public land. That corridor already exists parallel to the Bonneville Power Administration 500 kV line. But deep political magic has protected that option from the agencies' serious consideration, so unless that changes, we have to step back and take a new perspective. **It is finally time to ask not "where" but "why."**

The SSJVC web site has much information documenting how Montanans stand to get fleeced by the false claims and half-truths of the NorthWestern's MSTI spin. But the deep tragedy of MSTI is that its hulking structures and buzzing lines would take away forever the open, scenic landscape that people here have stewarded for generations. That landscape is not only our past but our future as well. Serving up Jefferson Valley's landscape to MSTI would violate a sacred trust. And it's critical to recognize that DEQ's and BLM's decision not only paves the way for MSTI, but establishes a brand new corridor that would likely be selected for additional expected gigantic transmission lines as well.

If MSTI gets crammed down our throats, greater Whitehall will suffer a substantial transfer of wealth and quality of life from the local general public to corporations and customers elsewhere. Whitehall is like David fighting a Goliath of top-down political pressure that's in a mad rush to grab our own "stimulus" tax dollars and use them to degrade our own community for the benefit of others. Nothing is "clean" or "green" about MSTI in Jefferson Valley, where so much open land and natural resources would be lost.

Now NorthWestern is running feel-good advertisements with a little girl blowing a pinwheel and a boy waving an American flag. Those kids are models. Our own real kids fly kites and fish today where MSTI is sited. Our kids and many other real Jefferson Valley kids will get hurt unless this community acts to protect Jefferson Valley from MSTI now. NorthWestern has some nerve using kids for this.

And shame on NorthWestern for waving the American flag over its greedy, mistaken goals. NorthWestern, the DEQ, and local economic development promoters all need to stop pretending MSTI is a public-benefit, environmentally justified, "green" project for Montana. Even the "draft-draft" EIS, written by the industry hacks, sputters pitifully in trying to come up with local benefits of MSTI. Our federal elected officials need to make absolutely sure our own federal "stimulus" tax dollars are not used against us for this unjustified project.

MSTI is not the harbinger of America's clean energy future. MSTI is a last gasp of the old order trying to preserve the old ways. We support renewable energy development fully. But we need not serve up our land and landscape for the mistaken goals of NorthWestern and its political enablers. Now is the time for Jefferson Valley, along with Townsend, Silver Star, Twin Bridges, Dillon, and communities all along the newly flipped MSTI route, to stand firm and let our voices be heard.

Sincerely,

Don and Brett Kronenberger