



## Energy and Telecommunications Interim Committee

### 65th Montana Legislature

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### DRAFT

**January 16, 2018**

**TO:** Energy and Telecommunications Interim Committee Members  
**FR:** Trevor Graff

House Joint Resolution No. 28, passed and approved by the 2017 Legislature, proposes the study of natural gas consumer choice in eastern Montana. NorthWestern Energy (NWE) customers in western Montana are currently able to choose their natural gas provider. The same choice is not available to Montana Dakota Utilities (MDU) customers in the east.

As an initial step in the ETIC's study process, members received answers to a questionnaire submitted to MDU regarding the effects of implementing consumer choice on their systems. To further the study, the chairman asked that members amend and submit the following questions for review by Big Sky Gas, a third-party natural gas supplier that currently provides services on NWE's system. Staff would request response by Feb. 16 and will review the responses in cooperation with the Public Service Commission in advance of the March ETIC meeting.

1. Detail the potential benefits Big Sky Gas customers could receive as a result of implementing natural gas consumer choice in eastern Montana.
2. Detail the potential benefit customers could receive by electing to buy gas from Big Sky Gas in the event that natural gas consumer choice is implemented in eastern Montana.
3. Describe the nature of complaints Big Sky Gas has received regarding utilities in Montana.
4. Describe the current rate structures employed by Big Sky Gas under operational consumer choice programs.
5. How do Big Sky Gas rates compare to other utilities and suppliers in the state?
6. Describe the programs offered by Big Sky Gas through membership organizations like the AARP or American Legion.
7. Does Big Sky Gas offer consistent rates across its service territories?
8. Does Big Sky Gas offer service to customers in all of the communities served by NorthWestern Energy? If not, why?
9. Describe the delivery of Big Sky's product on current transmission and distribution

systems in Montana?

10. Describe Big Sky Gas's involvement in natural gas delivery on NWE's system from receipt to delivery.
11. How does Big Sky Gas contract to ensure natural gas is delivered to NWE's system and to ensure peak demand volumes are met?
12. Given the differences between NorthWestern energy's natural gas system and MDU's natural gas system, What measures must Big Sky Gas employ to ensure the delivery of adequate natural gas to Big Sky customers on the MDU system?
13. Does Big Sky Gas deny service to customers deemed not to be credit worthy?
14. Should Big Sky Gas adhere to the termination requirements of ARM 38.5.1401-1408 or similar regulations? Describe the company's current customer termination policies and practices.

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