

# YUKON

## Committee accused of poor community engagement

By AINSLIE CRUICKSHANK  
Star Reporter

Don Roberts is concerned that the select committee regarding the risks and benefits of hydraulic fracturing

will only hear one side of the story during its upcoming trip to Alberta.

Roberts is a founding member of Yukoners Concerned about Oil and Gas Development/Exploration, a group vocal about the risks associ-

ated with hydraulic fracturing or fracking.

Speaking Friday to a draft itinerary accidentally released by the Yukon government in mid-November, Roberts noted the committee only plans to visit Red Deer and Calgary, two areas highly dependent on oil and gas development.

His concern is the story from those communities will focus primarily on the benefits of oil and gas development.

Roberts suggested a balancing perspective could be gained by visiting Rosebud, Alta., a small community near Canmore.

Jessica Ernst, from Rosebud, launched a \$33-million lawsuit against the Alberta government, the province's energy regulator, and Encana in 2011, claiming that fracking wells around her property contaminated her water wells.

"There's a community there I'm sure would be quite willing to speak to the committee about what's happened to their area," Roberts told the *Star*.

Ernst had paid a visit to Whitehorse about a year and a half ago to share her experience, he recalled.

Patti McLeod, the chair of the select committee and the Yukon Party MLA for Watson Lake, said Friday she isn't familiar with Rosebud nor the story of Ernst's lawsuit.

"Certainly, some areas were considered, but we have a very limited time," she said in an interview.

"We're certainly willing to meet and talk to interest groups, including community groups," she



DON ROBERTS



PATTI MCLEOD

McLeod assured the *Star* today

Yukoners Concerned, she pointed out.

But Roberts isn't convinced.

"It's not like we haven't engaged our discussion with the committee, but I think it's all fallen on deaf ears," said the former Liberal cabinet minister of the early 2000s.

"I just think they want what they want, and they're going to get what they want, and they don't care what the results are going to be; they just want to make sure they're the results they want.

"At least, that's our view at this point. I don't think it's a non-biased committee," he said.

McLeod noted legislative hearings are scheduled for late January, and public consultations will be held in Old Crow, Watson Lake, and possibly Whitehorse.

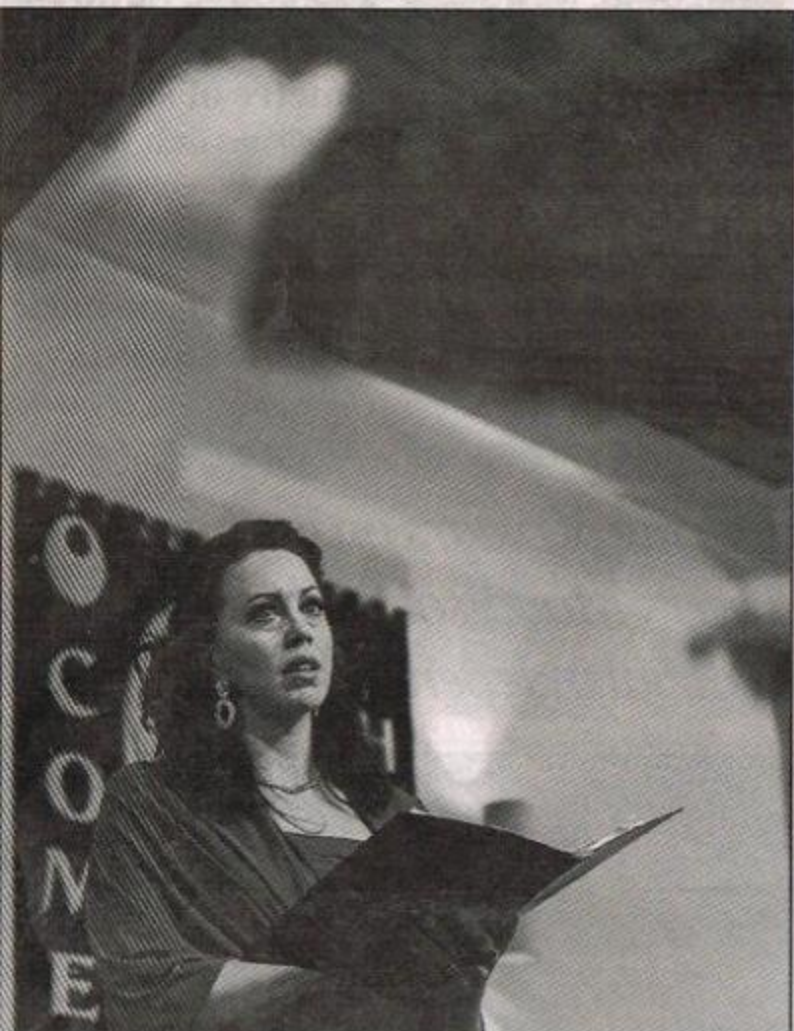
The legislative hearings will not be open format, but rather an opportunity for the public to hear from experts from both sides of the debate she said.

The committee will ask relevant questions, and there may be some questions taken from the audience.

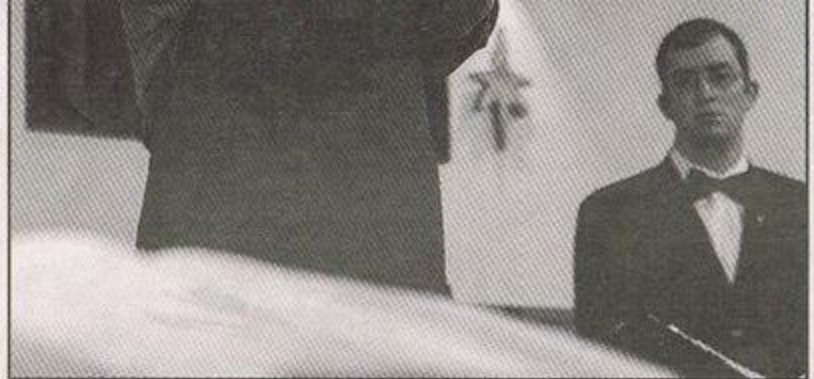
The public forums have not yet been scheduled.

According to the draft itinerary released in November, the select committee planned to meet with representatives from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, and the Pembina Institute, an organization devoted to policy research on climate change and energy issues.

The committee also planned to meet with an academic researcher, potentially Chris Clarkson, the







Staff photo by ANNA CRAWFORD

explained when asked if Rosebud was considered for the itinerary.

"Our schedule and the people that we see is largely tied in to when these people are available and if they're available," she added.

Roberts also raised concerns that the finalized itinerary has not yet been released, even though committee members are scheduled to depart Jan. 6.

He suggested the committee is doing a poor job of engaging Yukoners in the process.

the itinerary will be released before the trip, although she couldn't confirm when or even if it had been finalized.

She also took issue with Roberts' insinuation that the committee is only interested in the benefits side of fracking.

"I think the committee is quite committed to getting a balanced series of presentations," McLeod said.

The committee has heard presentations by Roberts' group,

Encana Alberta Innovates Technology Futures Chair in Unconventional Gas and Light Oil Research, representatives from the Alberta Energy Regulator, the executive director from Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, the Canadian Society of Unconventional Resources, Environment and Health Canada, and the National Energy Board.

Members also plan to visit a fracking site in Red Deer accompanied by company representatives.