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## ***Editorial: Another Billion Buck Boondoggle***

British Columbians have been left with the idea that aspects of the Smart Meter Program would not stand close scrutiny because Premier Campbell's *Clean Energy Act* exempted it from BC Utilities Commission oversight.

Smart metering is usually intended to facilitate time-of-day pricing, but the BC government has ruled this out. Without time-of-day pricing, the business case for the Smart Meter Initiative (SMI) doesn't stand up.

So, BChydro is relying on anticipated 'savings' through the detection and prevention of electricity theft, presumably by marijuana grow-ops, to justify installing the meters at 1,800,000 homes in BC.

Theft relies on tapping into electricity supply before it is metered; we see no reason why the type of meter used would change that. The SMI also provides for the installation of smart meters at other points in the distribution system, which presumably allows comparison between neighbourhood electricity use and the sum of that recorded on residential meters.

While this may identify missing (and possibly stolen) quantities of electricity, it does not identify the building where power went missing. In fact, smart meters are not necessary to detect this loss. BChydro has failed to make a case for 100% surveillance of household electricity

consumption patterns.

A critical question remains: how much electricity theft is there in BC? BChydro says it has a Present Value of \$732 million, but does not indicate how this figure was calculated. The recent deputy ministers' Review of BChydro mentions that this is backed up by a calculation by Darryl Plecas and his team at the University College of the Fraser Valley.

Plecas' work estimates that there are 10,000 commercial size grow-ops in BC, and only 20% of them steal their electricity. There are many other estimates of the number of grow-ops, but none support BChydro's statements that electricity worth \$60-\$100 million is stolen every year. In fact, the \$732 million appears to be a figure devised to justify the Smart Meter Initiative. A BCUC review would have determined the truth of this calculation.

Once again, the Campbell legacy has left BC ratepayers with a billion dollar boondoggle. Once again, BChydro is in the position of having to invent a financial justification for a Campbell decree. Once again, the BCUC is left out of the loop.

It's time for this Campbell legacy to be abandoned, by this government or another. ☞

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