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## Steve Duin: I hear the (coal) train a comin'

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I have wandered the dreary length of Gov. John Kitzhaber's letter to the Council on Environmental Quality, searching in vain for the only words that matter on the future of Oregon and coal exports:

"Over my dead body."

"Significant concerns" speckle the March 25 letter, co-authored with Washington Gov. Jay Inslee.

"Urgings" abound. Choking on potential CO2 emissions, the governors claim incredulity that "the federal government would ignore the inevitable consequences of coal leasing and coal export."

Yet in the end, Kitzhaber and Inslee lie quietly down at the end of their leash and beg the feds for that "full public airing" on what it means to export 100 million tons of coal, the carbon footprint of 40 million automobiles.

As if we don't know how that charade will play out.

Kitzhaber wants the feds to weigh the "true costs" of coal production?

Those environmental champs who ginned up an exemption to the Clean Water Act so that the industry could dump the slag from mountain-top coal removal into Appalachian streams?

The industry lackeys, at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue, who are so gung-ho on the \$7 billion Keystone XL pipeline? Who continue to claim that transporting 700,000 barrels of oil each day from the Alberta tar sands to Gulf Coast refineries will have negligible impact on climate change?

Do Kitzhaber and Inslee seriously think the feds are losing sleep over greenhouse gases, especially those generated by burning coal in China?

Why would the two governors pretend they might get a response that serves the environment or the states they are pledged to defend?

Unless, of course, that pretense provides Kitzhaber and Inslee with a little disingenuous breathing room between their environmental and union supporters?

Yes, it's a tough squeeze for Democrats ... but, no, it doesn't justify the literary fantasy that the Council on Environmental Quality -- or anyone else inside the Beltway -- is still in the market for a "thorough examination" of the downside of coal exports.

Coal producers are up to speed. The state of Colorado has tripled its coal exports in the last three years; Montana's have increased six-fold. In Wyoming, where coal-mining is king, coal royalties amount to almost one-fifth of the state budget.

With apologies to Johnny Cash, I hear that mile-long coal train a comin', and it's aimed at the Columbia River Gorge and proposed export terminals in Oregon and Washington.

A belated consultation with the feds has no hope of derailing that express, not when the U.S. Senate has already decreed that greenhouse gas emissions produced by that coal outside the United States are not subject to the National Environmental Policy Act.

In the 20 months since Bill McKibben at 350.org concluded that the XL pipeline was an absolute game-changer in the global warming debate, he and his supporters have made civil disobedience a crucial part of the anti-Keystone campaign. Protesters have not only provoked mass arrests at the White House but dogged President Barack Obama elsewhere.

In his tepid missive to the CEQ, Kitzhaber may have correctly gauged Oregon's willingness to facilitate the "pipeline" that moves another 240 million tons of coal each year from the U.S. mines to the Asian markets.

If he hasn't, you might want to show up at his ceremonial office or one of his public lectures and tell him so.

The coal train has left the station. Someone needs to throw his body on the tracks, and Kitzhaber has yet to hear that lonesome whistle blow.

--Steve Duin on Twitter --

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