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Testimony in Opposition to SB 24, Energy Choice Act
House Energy, Telecommunications and Utilities Committee, Rep. Joe Siewart, Chair
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Mr. Chair, Ranking Member Kuether, members of the committee –

Thank for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Rabbi Moti Rieber, I serve as executive director of Kansas Interfaith Action, a statewide, multi-faith issue advocacy organization works on a variety of social, economic and climate justice issues. We represent primarily Mainline Protestant, moderate Catholic, Jewish, Muslim and Unitarian Universalist communities of faith in Kansas, and are the state public policy office of both the Central States Synod of the ELCA Lutheran Church and the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference of the United Church of Christ. I testify today in opposition to SB 24.

The denominations, faith communities, and individuals that comprise Kansas Interfaith Action take as the very core of our mission, the care of God’s Creation. Our commitment to Creation care is an inseparable part of our religious identity and mission. This witness becomes all the more important as Creation becomes more damaged by climate disruption caused by human activity

We oppose this bill both on the merits and on the process.

We know that in order to avoid the worst repercussions of human-caused climate disruption, we need to move as quickly as possible to decarbonize our economy. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) tells us that the world needs to be half decarbonized by 2030, and fully decarbonized by 2050, to hit the internationally recognized 1.5-degree target. We simply cannot meet that budget if we continue to rely on fossil fuels, including natural gas. Even natural gas’ current advantages are short-lived. As we saw during the recent polar vortex, its reliability and low cost have been vastly overstated.

At the time when our highest priority was retiring coal plants, natural gas seemed like a good alternative – a bridge fuel, we called it. This always underestimated natural gas’ impact on the climate. Natural gas is mostly made of methane, a fast-acting greenhouse gas with enormous short-term impacts on climate. It leaks at every stage of the production and transportation process. These methane leaks wipe out natural gas’ advantages over coal as a carbon emitter. In the longer term, natural gas cannot be considered part of a climate-resilient energy strategy.¹

Second, on the process. It is nearly impossible to develop policy, or even have a conversation about, climate policy in the Kansas legislature. There are no committees dedicated to addressing these issues; the only germane committees, so to speak, are commodity committees like agriculture or utilities. That has meant that municipalities are put in the position of having to develop climate policy in Kansas. So when a members of a community like Lawrence do the hard work of organizing themselves and convincing their municipal government to adopt a

¹ “More natural gas isn’t a “middle ground” — it’s a climate disaster”, Vox.com, <https://www.vox.com/energy-and-environment/2019/5/30/18643819/climate-change-natural-gas-middle-ground>

climate policy, industry groups run to the state legislature to pass a bill to preempt it. It's anti-democratic as well as anti-environmental.

Mr. Chairman, for years now this legislature has been derelict in its duty to address climate change – both the causes, and the effects, which include health impacts, water availability, floods and droughts, increased wildfires, heat impact days, etc. Yet we never talk about that. The only policy related to climate that is even able to get a hearing is an anti-environmental, anti-climate, fossil-fueled bill like this one.

We are grateful for natural gas for the role it has played in moving us away from coal. But we have better options now, and we will certainly have better options in 15 years when the Lawrence ordinance is to go into effect. As time goes on, those options will become cheaper and easier. We don't need to use the mechanisms of state government to protect the natural gas industry far into the future – to pick winners and losers, as the saying goes.

Mr. Chairman, we need policy on this issue, but it's not this one. We call on this committee not to undermine the hard work done by the citizens of Lawrence, not to force us backwards in the long, hard fight against climate disruption, and not to pass SB 24.

Thank you for your attention.