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Testimony in Opposition to SB 24, Energy Choice Act
Senate Utilities Committee, Sen. Mike Thompson, chair
January 27, 2021

Mr. Chair, Ranking Member Francisco, members of the committee –

Thank for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Rabbi Moti Rieber, and I’m the 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 and faith communities that make up Kansas Interfaith Action take as the very core of our mission, care of God’s Creation. This becomes all the more important as Creation becomes more polluted by human activity, particularly climate disruption caused by human activity. It needs to be said as clearly as possible: Our concern for creation care is an inseparable part of our religious identity

There are three bases on which we oppose this bill:

First, on the policy. 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 IPCC says the world needs to be half decarbonized by 2030, and fully decarbonized by 2050, to hit the 1.5-degree target. We simply cannot meet that budget if we continue to rely on fossil fuels, including natural gas.

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

Second, on the process, or the precedent. It is painfully difficult to develop policy, or even to 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 have to do the heavy lifting of developing climate policy in Kansas. So when a members of a community like Lawrence do the hard work of organizing and convincing their municipalities 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>

comprehensive climate policy, industry groups come to the legislature to preempt it. It's anti-democratic as well as anti-environmental.

And third: this legislature has been and continues to be derelict in its duty to address climate change – both the causes, and the effects. We are already seeing effects in Kansas in terms of health impacts, water availability, floods and droughts, increased wildfires, heat impact days, etc. etc. Yet we don't talk about that. The only policy related to environmental or 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, particularly in moving us away from coal. But we have better options – wind and solar are available to be deployed now in ways that would obviate the need to build new LNG capacity or infrastructure. And as time goes on, those options will become cheaper and easier. We don't need to put the support of state government behind this industry – 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.