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Testimony in Opposition to SB 279, Wind Energy Restrictions
Senate Utilities Committee, Sen. Mike Thompson, chair

March 22, 2021

Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today. My name is Rabbi Moti Rieber, and I am executive director of Kansas Interfaith Action, a statewide, multi-faith issue-advocacy organization that “puts faith into action” by educating, engaging and advocating on behalf of people of faith and the public regarding critical social, economic and climate justice issues.

It’s hard to understand why we’re even having this hearing. Wind energy has been one of the main bright spots in the Kansas economy over the past 10 years, leading to over 20,000 direct and indirect jobs and over \$1.5 billion dollars in direct economic benefits to Kansas counties and landowners. It’s one of few industries benefiting rural areas, and I wouldn’t be at all surprised if it’s the representatives of those areas who are some of this measure’s most ardent opponents.

Subjecting the wind industry to the onerous and unnecessary requirements of SB 279 would be similar in impact to passing laws limiting Kansas’ wheat production or cattle ranching. It would be the very definition of “cutting off Kansas’ nose to spite its face.”

But other conferees will make the economic arguments more effectively than I. My role is to bring a moral message, and it is this: 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 are already seeing effects of human-caused climate disruption in Kansas in terms of health impacts, water availability, floods and droughts, increased wildfires, heat impact days, etc. etc., and these will become more pronounced every day that we don’t act. And of course, as with all injustices, the impacts are felt first and worst by “the least among us” – poor people, people of color, rural and other already marginalized communities. Climate disruption is therefore a pressing *moral* issue – a challenge to the commitment of every major faith tradition to care for God’s Creation.

The wind industry has been very successful in helping to limit Kansas’ carbon emissions – down 40% over the last 10 years. As our nation and the world gets more serious about addressing the threat of human-caused climate disruption, wind energy and other renewables such as solar, geothermal and energy efficiency will become even more central to the strategy. With its copious wind and solar

resources – the “Saudi Arabia of wind” - Kansas is well-positioned to come out ahead in the transition to the clean-energy economy; in fact, we already have, with wind providing over 40% of our utility power and with Kansas having the fifth-highest installed wind capacity in the country.

This bill is but another step in the chair of this committee’s one-man crusade against the science of climate disruption. Although he refuses to acknowledge the problem, we still have the opportunity to be part of the solution. A big part of that is wind energy. Kansas cannot be allowed to throw away a major part of its economy, and a major part of the strategy to address human-caused climate disruption, due to the obsessions of one politician.

For the sake of justice, for the sake of Creation, and for the sake of Kansas’ economy and the wellbeing of rural areas, for the sake of saying to Kansas and the world that wind energy is here to stay, SB 279 must not be allowed to go into law.