

TESTIMONY OF GRANT MAYFIELD (OVERLAND PARK, KS) ON SB 24 BEFORE THE KANSAS SENATE UTILITIES COMMITTEE

I'd like to start today by asking you to think about the not so distant future, 30 years from now. In all likelihood, you will no longer be a member of the Kansas legislature. In fact, some of the members of this committee will be dead. 30 years from now I will be 55 years old. And 30 years from now, our planet will be 1.3-1.8 degrees Centigrade warmer than it is today.

Kansas is not facing rising oceans or an increased threat from hurricanes but the effects of the climate crisis are already becoming a reality in the Sunflower State. For us the impact of this warming will include a continuous cycle of devastating floods followed by years of drought, increasingly dangerous fires and months-long heat waves that will undoubtedly kill Kansans. All of these, as well as those hurricanes and rising oceans, will have enormous impacts on our economy, meaning that even those who don't face a direct threat from these completely un-natural disasters, will find their livelihoods more precarious.

For the last several decades most of the world and this legislature took a voluntary approach to addressing this crisis. We hoped and we crossed our fingers that the good-hearted nature of Kansans to voluntarily make sustainable choices would save us. But as we've seen, that hasn't worked and it never will.

Now I wish it had, because I am no proponent of unnecessary big government regulation or mandates upon individuals or businesses. But that's not the world we live in today and it's not the way we will survive what's coming. We have to change our mindset and be able to try new things and we must get creative about solutions.

There is no silver bullet that will solve this crisis. There is no single piece of legislation that we can enact tomorrow and save ourselves from ourselves. Instead, the future must include experimentation in order to find the solutions that not only have the greatest mitigation impact, but account for the expectations of Kansans about their government.

This bill will not have an extreme impact on the climate. The sustainability gains to be made in banning natural gas hookups on new development are just one tool in the toolbox for solving this problem. Thankfully municipalities have stepped up where the state and federal governments have refused to. Across the country and right here in Kansas our local governments are exploring their options to make their communities cleaner and more sustainable.

This bill does not address the climate crisis and of course not every bill that comes through this legislature or even this committee will do so. What this bill does is prevent municipalities from acting in the interest of their citizens and the future. If this bill becomes law, should a group of residents come to their city council and demand cleaner air and lower emissions via a transition to all-electric development, they would have their hands tied.

We hear lots of talk in this legislature about local control and home rule and preventing the over-regulation from big government. This bill flies in the face of that. Apparently, this committee believes voters are either too fragile or too stupid to vote out their council members should they disagree with that completely hypothetical municipal policy.

The supporters of this bill have referred to it as the energy Choice Act - Preventing quote-unquote discrimination on behalf of individuals and developers against the tyrannical impulses of municipalities. What this bill actually does is protect the rights of every Kansan to pollute their air however they see fit. This bill and the people who wrote it, work diligently on behalf of the natural gas industry to defend against a miniscule and completely hypothetical potential impact to their bottom line.

Industry lobbyists will also tell you that this is an attempt to protect the livelihood of natural gas workers. But what they fail to note is that renewable energy is the future and by propping up an already lucrative business model that will necessarily have to change, they are supporting the precariousness of the workers they employ. These short-sighted policies focused on next quarter's shareholder dividend rather than an inevitable changing of course, ignore the risk posed to gas industry workers, their investors and those of us that will live longer than the next 30 years.

If this committee wanted to protect the natural gas industry workforce, you could invest in retraining, in well cleanup, and in legislation that would allow corporations to transition to renewables without affecting their bottom line. But that's not what we're talking about.

At a time when the rest of the world is working diligently to protect our future, my future, this committee sees fit to spend its time protecting the natural gas industry from a completely hypothetical threat.

We have the solutions. We know what it will take to wean ourselves off of fossil fuels and dirty industry. But it will take political courage on the part of members of this legislature and committee if we are going to turn the page and set Kansas up for success in this quickly developing new reality. With Kansas's natural resources like wind we are poised to become a leader in the new energy economy. But rather than giving our state and its workers a leg up as we look toward forward, this bill fights to maintain the status quo.

I'm not asking you to understand these issues overnight and I'm not asking you to come up with that legislative Silver Bullet that we know does not exist. I'm asking you on behalf of the youth of this state, on behalf of your children and your grandchildren to do something. To help us create the solutions that will prevent this catastrophe. We are here at the table and willing to work with you on what makes sense for Kansans, but we need you to meet us in the middle.

Let's have hearings on the reality of this science. Let's better understand the impact it will have on Kansas. Let's allow municipalities to innovate and try out new solutions.

Should one city or county in our great state decide to take the step of going all-electric, we ought to review that case, understand the positive and negative impacts and, if necessary, regulate to protect Kansans from any unintended harms.

I want you to vote down this bill because it limits the ability of municipalities to lower their emissions and flies in the face of a long-standing tradition of home-rule. But more than anything, I want you to approach the rest of this session and the rest of your time in the Kansas legislature with enough compassion to act on behalf of young people and our futures.

If you are serious about representing your constituents, please come talk to me. And if your constituents are not yet aware of this crisis and the danger it poses to them personally, have the courage to lead them and warn them about what's coming. Have the courage to accept that the promotion of good public policy is more important than any potential political career you might have. And remember that 30 years from now some of you may be dead, but this crisis and its victims will live on.

I come before you today to discuss a small policy that will truly have a small impact on the climate, but what I hope you take away from this is that the time for crossing our fingers is over. The time for action is now.

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