

Testimony of Joe Biber

HB 6616: AN ACT ESTABLISHING WOOD SMOKE TO BE A PUBLIC NUISANCE

Good morning, Chairman Harris, Chairman Ritter, and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

For the record my name is Joe Biber, and I own and operate the Preston Trading Post, in Preston, CT, one of the nation's leading hearth products retailers. I am a member of the Northeast Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association (NEHPBA); an affiliate of the HPBA. We support responsible wood heating.

I am opposed to H.B. 6616 (Raised) because it does not identify standards and it does not exempt EPA certified appliances. This casts a threatening shadow over the future of residential wood combustion (RWC) heating, interfering with the proven strategy of replacing old technology stoves with much cleaner burning, new technology EPA certified wood and pellet appliances, a necessary option for energy independence. The strategy of Clean Heat woodstove change-out programs has proven effective at reducing ambient air particulates and even indoor air quality and deserves support. It is no accident that the recently enacted Stimulus package signed into law by President Obama provides a 30% federal tax credit for 75% efficient biomass burning stoves, including wood burning stoves. The federal government and EPA recognize the value of RWC and grasp its importance in America's energy complex. This new program drives consumers to seek high efficiencies, which correlates to cleaner burning. This is a step in the right direction and echoes current programs in France and Norway which endorse, and in the case of Norway, mandates, new efficient woodstoves in every new primary residence. This tax

credit provides an excellent incentive and opportunity to retire old for new and get cleaner air in the bargain.

Reportedly, 16.4% of homes in CT use RWC devices. Roughly half of these 217,000 homes use fireplaces. About 95,000 use stoves or inserts, of which about 25,000 are EPA certified. The EPA certified to non-compliant ratio improves with time. Fortunately, we live in a part of the country that does not suffer frequent inversions or have deep valleys where smoke concentrates, and wood smoke is seldom a problem. A visit to airnow.gov, with hourly PM_{2.5} status reports, demonstrates that our air quality is virtually always good in CT, despite the cold winter and number of wood appliances in use. Likewise, most air monitoring stations show flat to declining particulates over the seven year tracking period. And wood burning is certainly not the only contributor; diesel and auto exhaust, fossil-fueled power plants, industrial activity, transport, biogenic and road dust, oil, gas, and coal furnaces contribute to the totals. But improvements to air quality can be made. Changing out older appliances and better educating users does make a difference.

All conventional heat energy options have implications for air quality. Some are better and some are worse than wood. Compared with the other sources, wood produces the least greenhouse gas emissions and wood is lowest in acid equivalents. A user of electric heat might be surprised to learn that the inefficiencies of transmission and the use of fossil fuels for energy production mean more particulates are generated with electric heat. Additionally, the RWC option helps keep conventional energy costs in check. Global events can send energy costs sky-rocketing. The wood option provides pushback.

We recognize that a small number of stove owners unwittingly let their fires smolder and others may have not made the best choices of appliances or cannot afford to upgrade. They may pose a

problem for their neighbors. But there already exists a mechanism to deal with complaints via the CT DEP.

In closing, the multiple benefits of RWC; that it is renewable, indigenous to CT, and economical, are environmentally justifiable when done responsibly.