

Chair Fonfara, Chair Nardello, Members of the Committee on Energy and Technology. My name is Matthew Mitchell. I live in Norwalk and I represent the Norbert E. Mitchell Company located in Danbury. We employ over 140 local residents and serve thousands of our neighbors in Western Connecticut. Our company has been in business in Connecticut since 1945 when my grandfather returned from World War II and started the business. I come here today in opposition to SB 450.

As the 3rd generation of my family to run our business, I take a lot of pride in the tremendous trust that our customers and the community put in us every day. In our industry, customer service is more than just a tag line or a marketing slogan. Providing good customer service is the only way we can survive and grow in Connecticut's competitive heating oil marketplace.

It's not easy to operate a full-service heating oil business, which is why after over one hundred years of market activity there are very few national players in the Connecticut heating oil market. It takes constant attention to detail, organization and local knowledge to provide the level of service and responsiveness that we do. It's the kind of local responsiveness and concern that is impossible to administer from a corporate board room in New York City, California or Spain. We comply with hundreds of federal, state and local laws and regulations, carry over 30 licenses, and pay over 50 different taxes and fees (over 30 to the state of Connecticut).

Even with all of these challenges and obstacles that our industry faces, we are not here to ask you for help or handouts. We are just asking you not to pass legislation that will give an unfair, taxpayer-funded advantage to a competing product. Passing SB 450 will effectively put the government in the natural gas business by encouraging and funding the conversion of oil fired systems to natural gas. If your reason for doing this is that natural gas is so much cheaper than heating oil, then that should be an easy sell for the Natural Gas industry to make to the consumer on their own without our tax dollars funding their customer acquisition campaign. If your reason for doing this is that natural gas is more environmentally-friendly than heating oil, then you should refer to the work that our industry has done over the last 40 years to reduce the average household oil consumption by over 30% and the recent legislation that was passed in 2010, with the help of the members of the Environment Committee, to virtually eliminate the sulfur content in heating oil and add a renewable fuel component. This new standard would, by the end of this decade, displace 10% of traditional heating oil with cleaner burning, domestically produced renewable fuel making it every bit as clean as natural gas.

It is true that most of us are old, family businesses that have been in our communities for decades. But what is also true is that we are an industry that is constantly reinventing itself to leverage new technologies and meet the needs of our community. Our company and our employees are prepared to meet any challenge that the future of energy will throw at us, including competing with a product that for the moment is cheaper than the one we sell. However, our own elected officials should not force us to compete against multi-national, government-backed entities that use our own tax dollars to steal our customers. Allow us to compete with these multinational companies on a level playing field and I assure you that there will be only one winner, the Connecticut consumer.