

Written Testimony of Michael Harder
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Energy and Technology Committee
March 7, 2013
Concerning HB 6360, An Act Concerning Implementation of Connecticut's
Comprehensive Energy Strategy

Senator Duff, Representative Reed, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HB 6360, An Act Concerning Implementation of Connecticut's Comprehensive Energy Strategy. My name is Michael Harder, and I am a resident of Hebron, Connecticut. I am now retired, having spent my entire 32 year career in the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection in the water quality and waste management programs. Since the days of Silent Spring, I have maintained a life-long commitment to improving and protecting our environment. After retirement, I have stayed involved and interested in environmental issues, presently serving as Vice-Chairman of the Hebron Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commission, and Chairman of the Hebron Citizens Green Committee. Please note that I am providing these comments as a private citizen, not in my capacity locally.

I would like to first commend the legislature for your commitment to energy efficiency and a clean energy future for our state. Connecticut has been a leader in enacting laws designed to reduce our demand for fossil fuels and increase the use of alternative, clean sources of energy. However, despite these efforts, and similar efforts by other states and the federal government, I am concerned that the battle against the negative effects of climate change is being lost. Further, without stronger steps being taken in the near term to deal more effectively with this problem, I fear that society may be approaching the point where catastrophic impacts are unavoidable.

It is for these reasons that I would urge you to take even stronger steps than proposed in this bill to further the cause of energy efficiency and reduced demand for fossil fuels. Just as the legislature in 1967 recognized the importance of clean water, and gave the state the authority to order polluters to clean up their discharges, the state should now have the authority to mandate that more steps be taken to achieve our energy efficiency goals. Steps such as changing the state's building code to require stricter insulation requirements for all new buildings, and retrofit requirements to higher standards upon sale of existing building, should be taken now, including for all residential structures. Mandating that improvements be made as part of the sale of existing buildings will allow the costs of those transactions to be factored into the sale at the best time: when the money is on the table. While this should address most concerns regarding costs, if it can be demonstrated that cost is a clear impediment to making the improvements, then one or more parties to the transaction should be able to access clean energy funds to make the improvements. In addition, the state should have the authority to require building owners to report on their energy use and, for certain high energy users, to retrofit their buildings and/or processes to significantly improve their energy efficiency. There is simply not enough time to rely on the hope that passive incentives, as beneficial as they may be, will drive the changes that are needed as quickly as they are needed. As we have seen from the dramatic climate-induced changes that have occurred in our environment in recent years, bold steps such as these must be taken in order for the State of Connecticut to address climate change in a meaningful way.

Regarding natural gas specifically, although this fuel will be a necessary part of progress toward clean air, and conversion will bring some climate related benefits, it should not be seen as a permanent solution. We should limit the payback period for gas main expansions so that we can transition more effectively to renewable energy in the long run. In addition, the state should compare all of the economic and environmental costs and benefits of expansions with other alternatives, such as energy efficiency measures or ground source heat pumps, and compare the job impacts. Natural gas conversions should be paired with code-level efficiency improvements, to ensure that homes that convert to gas are not wasting that fuel. Perhaps most importantly, Connecticut's natural gas plan should include a mechanism that ensures it is consistent with the state's long-term climate change goals.

I urge your support for stronger clean energy and energy efficiency measures in HB 6360, for their benefits to our air quality and climate goals, for the cost savings these policies will offer Connecticut residents, and for the additional economic activity and jobs this energy strategy will generate.

Thank you very much for your consideration of these comments.

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