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Testimony of Rabbi Moti Rieber, Kansas Interfaith Power & Light
in Opposition to HB 2114
House Committee on Energy and Environment
March 19, 2013

Good morning, Chairman Hedke, Members of the Committee:

I thank you for the opportunity to express my organization's opposition to House Bill 2241, which delays our Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) in target year requirements, and provides an exemption to such requirements by showing of "good cause."

We consider this bill to be a solution without a problem, because the RPS has been a highly successful policy, bringing wide-ranging economic, social, health and environmental benefits to Kansans.

Most of the conferees opposed to this bill will be speaking today about the economic benefits of wind power in Kansas: about the \$3 billion dollars in investment in 2012; about the 13,000 jobs, often in rural areas of the state that have few other economic opportunities; about the payments in lieu of taxes that help keep roads cleared and schools open in these same areas. And these are all excellent points.

I will instead focus my remarks on the other benefits - the health, resource-conservation and environmental benefits - of renewable energy. As you know, I am motivated in my work by the instruction we were given by God to "protect creation" (Genesis 2:15) and to consider the impact of human activity "for future generations" (Gen 9:12). Wind energy benefits our entire state with an inexpensive, plentiful and clean energy source that keeps our air clean while neither consuming nor endangering enormous quantities of water.

Clean air is essential to life and good health. There is a growing concern about the health effects of air pollution on God's creation. Burning fossil fuels causes air pollution, in the form of

- mercury, which causes developmental delays, especially in the newborn and preborn.
- sulfur oxides, the main cause of acid rain, which can make lakes and rivers too acidic for plant and animal life. Acid rain also damages crops and buildings.
- nitrogen oxides, which combine with other chemicals to form ground-level ozone (smog). Both nitrogen oxides and ozone can irritate the lungs, cause bronchitis and pneumonia, and decrease resistance to respiratory infections, and
- fine particulate matter, which is a primary cause of asthma, the number one children's health problem.

The American Lung Association estimates that the human health costs of outdoor air pollution ranges from \$14 billion to \$55 billion annually. Each year, air pollution claims 70,000 lives in the United States, and 200,000 to 500,000 lives worldwide. The increased risk of lung cancer, dangerous asthma attacks, and other respiratory ailments associated with air pollution, as well as the vast potential health issues related to global climate change, make reducing air pollution vital to protecting God's creation.

Moving strongly to renewable energy has tremendous potential to lower pollution levels and save lives. It is our obligation to our loved ones, our neighbors and the generations to come.

Another area where renewables have a clear advantage is in use of our natural resources, particularly water. Kansas are rightly concerned about the adequacy of our water resources in the coming years. Years of drought combined with lower rainfall patterns are forcing us to making us rely more heavily on our dwindling aquifer resources. Happily, wind farms don't use any water in the production of electricity – none.

And the third area where renewables have a clear advantage is in cleanup. Do you know what happens when there's an accident on a windfarm? It's a windy day. There are situations where a tornado could take down a turbine. But there are no oil-soaked birds, no destroyed land or water resources, no rivers to clean up, no hazmat suits.

People who make free-market arguments against the RPS are seriously remiss in not including the costs of fossil fuel generation along with its perceived benefits. The health impacts, the resource scarcity, the air pollution – plus the costs to the consumer of bringing electricity generation into line with strengthening federal environmental protections – are making such generation less and less attractive all the time, compared to clean, plentiful, locally developed wind energy.

In fact, energy generation from fossil fuels is one of the only resources whose price goes up over time. Compare that to wind energy, whose costs go down over time, and you will see why the RPS makes economic sense.

In the first round of testimony Felix Rovello mentioned the empty storefronts he sees in too many rural areas in our rural areas. These wind farms are sources of much needed financial support and jobs for some of our least economically developed areas.

And this leads me to my final point: the marked and obvious difference between the proponents and opponents of this bill. The opponents are a cross section of Kansans from all over the state, and all walks of life: farmers and ranchers, local government officials, economic development folks, concerned citizens, and people of faith. The proponents, on the other hand, are overwhelmingly from free-market thinktanks. I would put it to you that people flying in from Washington to drop their ideology on us are not concerned with whether Colby County has enough money to plow their roads or educate their children.

The question you must ask yourselves, dear legislators, is whether you sit here in service to the ideology of one individual or a small group of people, or whether you are in service to the people of Kansas. If you answer the latter, then your choice is clear: vote against HB 2241, here in committee, and let's end this bad idea right here and now.