



PO Box 654  
Lawrence, KS 66044

<https://kansasinterfaithaction.org>  
[mrieber@kansasinterfaithaction.org](mailto:mrieber@kansasinterfaithaction.org)  
(913) 232-2336

Rabbi Moti Rieber, Executive Director  
Rev. Rachael Pryor, Board Chair

**Testimony in Support of HB 2381, Energy Task Force**  
**House Energy, Utilities and Telecommunications Committee, Rep. Joe Siewart, Chair**  
February 23, 2021

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Kuether, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Rabbi Moti Rieber, and I am executive director of Kansas Interfaith Action, a statewide, multi-faith issue-advocacy organization that “puts faith into action” by educating, engaging, and advocating on behalf of people of faith and the public regarding critical racial, economic and climate justice issues. I am here today to speak in favor of HB 2381.

The congregations and denominations that make up Kansas Interfaith Action view human-caused climate disruption not solely as a matter of science, but a deeply moral issue as well. That is because the changes in the Earth’s climate caused by the burning of fossil fuels is already having effects that are felt first and worst by the disadvantaged in our society and in the world – Black and brown people, working and poor people. If you think this is an exaggeration or a far-future prospect, look at the events in Texas over the past week to see the cost, in money and in human lives, of ignoring human-caused climate disruption.

Kansas too is facing extremes caused or exacerbated by climate change, including temperature extremes, storms and drought, wildfires, quality and availability of drinking water, and more. These events are already causing millions of dollars’ worth of damage to the Kansas economy, and more is to come.

And the longer we put off dealing with this issue, the worse it will become. We basically have no climate policy in Kansas, and no mechanism to make any. No committee in this legislature is dedicated to climate issues or to environmental issues more generally. The only committees where related bills are heard are commodity committees such as Utilities or Agriculture, and these are far more concerned with the economics of the fossil fuel industry or industrial agriculture than the potential impacts – including on the economy – of climate disruption.

We need to focus on two areas: first, a rapid decarbonization of our economy, transitioning away from fossil fuels and toward sustainable sources of energy in the building, transportation, and agriculture sectors; and second, building resilience into our systems so that Kansans are protected from the worst consequences of climate disruption. There are many specific suggestions I could make – that I am eager to make – but one approach that was passed into law by Colorado a couple of years ago directed that every piece of legislation should have, in addition to a fiscal note, a climate note, that will take into account how the action is preparing the state, or not, for both the causes and the effects of climate disruption.

One area where Kansas has done well is in the development of wind energy, currently providing 41% of our utility-level power in Kansas. One area where we are not doing as well is in solar energy, where despite having a top ten solar resource, interference from the monopoly utility is keeping us from fully utilizing it. This is exactly the kind of thing that would need to be discussed by an energy task force.

Two of our major advocacy priorities over the past several years have been 1) development of a state energy plan, where we can plan the equitable and rapid transition to a clean energy economy, and 2) development of a state climate plan, which would plan for Kansas' climate-changed future.

This bill would begin to address the first of these priorities. We supported Governor Kelly's ERO last year because we wanted to get the policy underway, but with that option having been rejected, this is the next best thing. We are supportive of this task force because we think – as the consultants did – that Kansas needs a state energy plan, and this is the way to get there.

However, I am concerned that with such a large representation on the task force from dinosaur energy – as well as the presence of legislators who deny the science of climate disruption -- that the conversation will be stacked toward the “all of the above energy” conversation that we have had for too long in Kansas, and which prevents us from moving strongly in the direction of a full commitment to clean energy, and away from fossil fuels.

Mr. Chairman, human-caused climate disruption is the profound moral challenge of our time -- one that we have not yet begun to wrestle with. I have dedicated much of the past 10 years to organizing and advocating for Kansas to begin to address this issue with the seriousness that it requires. HB 2381 is just that – a beginning. I ask the committee to pass it favorably onto the full House for passage.

Thank you very much for your attention.