

VT House Natural Resources and Energy Committee Hearing

April 16, 2015

Good morning. My name is Betsy Hardy. I'm the Coordinator and staff person of VT Interfaith Power and Light. The name sounds like a utility, but it's not – the words Interfaith Power and Light have other layers of meaning. We call Interfaith Power and Light "IPL" for short.

Vermont IPL is a non-profit organization working statewide with individuals and faith communities – of all faiths – to take significant steps to address the climate crisis. Our work is centered around this single issue of global warming. We educate faith communities and individuals about energy use as a major cause of the climate crisis, and we discuss actions faith communities can take.

In addition to educating, we serve congregations in a variety of ways. The following are examples of our work. In order to help make Vermont houses of worship more energy efficient and to reduce their carbon emissions, Vermont IPL provides a free energy assessment for any faith community that requests one. So far, we've conducted over 200 energy assessments for faith communities in all parts of the state. We also have a matching grant program- providing funds for energy audits and projects to improve energy efficiency in church buildings.

Vermont IPL holds an annual conference, with workshops and a keynote speaker that's open to all who are interested. And we provide information through a variety of faith community programs, our email newsletter, and website.

Our 10th anniversary was in 2014. We now have 81 faith community members from all parts of the state and many more congregations and individuals with whom we work. Vermont IPL is *also* connected with the national Interfaith Power and Light network. Forty states have IPL organizations; the national office is in California.

Vermont IPL is an independent, non-profit organization, and we work in the

affiliated network with other IPL organizations. We're all working with faith communities to address the climate crisis. Because each state is different, however, the emphasis varies from state to state. This year, several other state IPLs are also working on a carbon pollution tax.

Vermont IPL has a skilled and dedicated volunteer board – you'll hear from our President next. The board understands the seriousness of the climate challenge facing our planet. They feel called to care for God's creation, not only by taking action in their own lives to reduce carbon emissions, but also to speak out, advocate, and encourage others to take action as well. The board agreed by consensus to be a sponsor of the Energy Independent Vermont campaign. They believe that putting a price on carbon is necessary if we're to have any hope of reducing carbon emissions to the level needed to prevent climate catastrophe.

For me personally, as a Catholic, I'm keenly aware of my responsibility to speak out for humans and the other beings with whom we share this sacred world, as well as for future generations of humans and other species.

The climate crisis is threatening much of creation including corals reefs, and their associated plants and animals as well as many arctic, alpine, and rainforest species. Even some of Vermont's plants and animals are threatened.

For many decades, the wealthy countries of the world have been emitting large quantities of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. Most of us didn't understand the damage this was doing to the atmosphere and to the whole biosphere until recent decades. But for the past 20+ years, scientists have been clearly showing us through photographs, reports, computer models, satellite data, and more, the effect burning fossil fuels is having on the world.

Now **97%** of the climate scientists worldwide agree that we face a severe crisis – one that requires us to act quickly to reduce carbon emissions to keep the global average temperature from rising 3, 4, 5 or more degrees Celsius. If Earth's temperature increased to that extent, our planet would be unfit for

habitation. It's reckless endangerment of life on Earth to ignore or deny the scientists' warnings and to be slow in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We need to act quickly!

As a person of faith called to love my neighbor, both here and around the world, it's troubling to know that our country historically produced about 25% of the global carbon emissions. The carbon stays in the atmosphere for a century or more, continuing to warm Earth. The rising temperature is melting arctic and glacier ice thus causing sea level rise, and it's causing severe droughts and storms. Pacific island nations are being inundated by the ocean, many parts of the world are suffering from shortages of fresh water, and increasing numbers of people are losing their homes, livelihoods, and sometimes their lives, to the catastrophic storms, droughts, and wildfires.

This is a matter of justice. Instead of loving and caring for our neighbors across the country and around the world, our way of life in America is making it more and more difficult for them to survive. And though most in this country haven't suffered to the extent that people in the Philippines or Vanuatu have suffered, we certainly have been affected and will continue to be to an increasing extent.

(pause)

Many legislators at the federal level are choosing to ignore the responsibility to care for, not exploit, creation. They're willfully denying the overwhelming evidence of what burning fossil fuels is doing to Earth's climate. It's wrong to cling to "business as usual" and not acknowledge what's happening to Earth's climate; this risks irreversible climate change. And it's hubris to believe that there's nothing to be concerned about, that technology will be able to solve the problems associated with climate change.

(pause)

Pope Francis will soon be releasing an important church teaching, called an encyclical. It's topic will be the environment and climate change. This is the first time an encyclical has been devoted to this topic.

The Pope has already made many statements about the seriousness of the climate crisis and has urged action. When speaking in January at a meeting of young people in the Philippines, he said, "...this country, more than many others, is likely to be seriously affected by climate change. You are called to care for creation not only as responsible citizens, but also as followers of Christ!"

Worldwide, many religious leaders have spoken out about the need for quick action to address the climate crisis, for example, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Dalai Lama, and Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartolomew, among others.

(pause)

British Columbia has had a carbon pollution tax for years and it's worked well. The province has been a model. Now, since legislative action hasn't happened at the federal level yet in this country, it's time for states to step up and pass carbon pollution taxes. It's my hope and prayer that Vermont will pass a carbon pollution tax in 2016, if not this year, and that it will be a model for the nation and the world.

Putting a price on carbon pollution is necessary if the state is to reach its goals for reducing carbon emissions. The bill put forward here would do this in a responsible way which would provide benefits for Vermont's economy and would not harm low-income households. The funds raised would be returned to Vermonters through rebates, tax cuts, and energy initiatives that save money. It would keep the funds raised by the pollution tax circulating in this state, instead of sending almost 2 billion dollars out of state as we do now. I ask you to please pass H.412, the carbon pollution tax bill.

Thank you for for your time.

Betsy Hardy