

Testimony of Ben Ederly Walsh, Climate and Energy Program Director, VPIRG

Senate Appropriations Committee, April 4, 2018

Good afternoon. For the record, my name is Ben Ederly Walsh and I am the Climate and Energy Program Director for the Vermont Public Interest Research Group, better known as VPIRG.

I am here to ask you to please retain Section C.110 of the budget – the climate section – and the other provisions and funding associated with that section.

VPIRG is the state's largest consumer protection and environmental advocacy organization, with over 40,000 members and supporters in every Senate and House district in the state.

Climate action is VPIRG's our top priority, both because of the severe threat global warming poses, and because of the significant economic opportunity climate action presents.

Several years ago, recognizing that Vermont was not on track to meet its climate goals (a trend that the most recent data bear out – Vermont's greenhouse gas emissions are actually up 4% since 1990), we and others began examining potential policies to put us back on track.

In doing so, it became clear to us that policy experts and economists across the political spectrum overwhelmingly saw carbon pricing as the most critical climate policy one could adopt. The question for us was then, was that the right call not just generally, but for Vermont specifically?

That's why, in 2014, VPIRG, VBSR and VEIC commissioned Regional Economic Models, Inc., or REMI, to conduct a thorough economic analysis of the impacts of potential carbon pricing policies on Vermont. Their analysis showed such a policy would result in increased economic growth.

Also in 2014, the Department of Public Service conducted the Total Energy Study, which modeled not only Vermont's economy, but Vermont's' energy system as well. Again, under various carbon pricing and decarbonization policies, it showed increased economic growth.

Both of these studies showed growth, and both are going on 4 years old.

That's why we were pleased to see the House include direction, and funding, for JFO to conduct its own more current, impartial study. Climate action is a critical issue, and the legislature should have its own analysis of decarbonization policies available to you as you decide where we go from here.

I also wanted to briefly mention the provision directing ANR to use funds from the Volkswagen settlement for transportation electrification, especially busses and trucks. Electric buses and trucks are the cleanest vehicles that can be purchased with that money, and focusing that investment on one technology will give us the best chance to shift the market for heavy vehicles in Vermont more broadly away from polluting fuels.

So, again, I am here to ask you to please retain the full climate section (Section C.110), and the other provisions and funding associated with that section.