

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESHB 2326

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to the Washington climate and rural energy development center.

Brief Description: Establishing the Washington climate and rural energy development center.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Agriculture & Ecology (originally sponsored by Representatives Linville, Romero, Lantz, Rockefeller, Cooper, Hunt, Simpson, Kagi and Ruderman).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Ecology: 1/22/02, 2/8/02 [DPS];
Appropriations: 2/11/02, 2/12/02 [DPS(AGEC)].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/16/02, 62-36.
Passed Senate: 3/8/02, 30-18.
Passed Legislature.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Authorizes the establishment of the Washington Climate and Rural Energy Development Center in the Washington State University energy program to serve as a central, non-regulatory, source of credible information and services to address climate change and clean energy activities.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & ECOLOGY

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Linville, Chair; Hunt, Vice Chair; Cooper, Dunshee, Grant, Kirby and Quall.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Schoesler, Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Delvin, Holmquist, Roach and Sump.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill by Committee on Agriculture & Ecology be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 16 members: Representatives Sommers, Chair; Doumit, 1st Vice Chair; Fromhold, 2nd Vice Chair; Cody, Dunshee, Grant, Kagi, Kenney, Kessler, Linville, McIntire, Pflug, Ruderman, Schual-Berke, Talcott and Tokuda.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Sehlin, Ranking Minority Member; Alexander, Boldt, Buck, Clements, Cox, Lisk, Mastin and Pearson.

Staff: Laurie Schaffler (786-7143).

Background:

In 1990 the U.S. Congress passed the Global Change Research Act, establishing the U.S. Global Change Research Program (USGCRP) and directing federal research agencies to coordinate a comprehensive national research program to study human-induced and natural processes of global change. The 1990 federal law also required the USGCRP to submit to Congress a national assessment to include and evaluate:

- the USGCRP's findings and scientific uncertainties associated with these findings;
- global change effects on a variety of societal and environmental factors, including the natural environment, agriculture, energy production and use, land use and water resources, transportation, human health and welfare, human social systems, and biological diversity; and
- current global change trends, human-induced and natural, and projected major trends for the next 25-100 years.

A major component of the national assessment are regional analyses involving workshops and assessments regarding potential consequences of climate change in a particular region. In 1997 a workshop was conducted for the Pacific Northwest Region or PNW (i.e., Washington, Oregon and Idaho). The PNW assessment is one of 18 regional assessments being conducted as part of the national assessment. The PNW assessment is to focus on the environmental and socioeconomic impacts of climate change, including issues such as forestry, water, marine ecosystems, coasts, agriculture and health.

The PNW assessment includes a report from the Climate Impacts Group (CIG), which is a group of scientist and policy analysts at the University of Washington. The CIG report, titled the "Impacts of Climate Change Pacific Northwest," identifies some climate change impacts, describes the modeling process for projecting climate change trends, and provides some general recommendations for future study or action.

Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill:

The Washington Climate and Rural Energy Development Center (the center) is created in the Washington State University energy program. The center is to serve as a central, impartial, non-regulatory, public source of credible information and services to address climate change and clean energy activities.

The center is assigned numerous duties. These duties include identifying key sectors that are likely to be affected by climate change, examining the feasibility of a carbon storage program, collecting scientific and technical data on climate change, and studying the effects of state action before federal action on Washington's competitive position with respect to other states.

The center must establish task forces and technical advisory committees, and the Legislature may appoint an oversight committee.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect July 1, 2002.

Testimony For: (Agriculture & Ecology) Data concerning climate change, needs to be collected by a reputable state source to ensure that the Legislature can have reliable information and advice to make decisions that effect the state's hydrosystems, agriculture, and salmon. A state-authorized center with extensive duties is necessary so that potential donors can feel that their donations will be utilized by an organization that is ethical, fiscally sound, and that has longevity.

There is no longer any serious discussion about whether climate change is occurring, and Washington is particularly vulnerable because of its agriculture and forestry lands and its fisheries. This is an important first step. Miracles may not be accomplished in this lifetime, but attention to this problem will benefit our children and grandchildren. The health benefits of reducing greenhouse gasses alone is enough to justify this bill.

Locating clean energy facilities in rural, depressed areas creates a valuable double bonus. Clean energy development can attract new industries to the state and benefit the communities that need the jobs the most.

The Washington State University energy program is the most logical state agency to host the center. It has both the professional resources and access to information that is necessary for the center to be successful.

If the state waits for the federal government to act, the state may never see any benefits.

Testimony For: (Appropriations) None.

Testimony Against: (Agriculture & Ecology) Potential impacts on climate is an international phenomenon and should be addressed through international and federal efforts, not state action. A reduction of greenhouse gasses in Washington will not have a perceivable effect on the global level of the gasses. Federal action is preferable because it effects everyone and not just the citizens of Washington.

The scientific community is still divided on the whether the climate is changing, and if it is, on whether it is a human-caused event. Until this debate is settled, policy actions are premature. The global climate systems are hardly understood at all, and science can not determine the cause of past events, let alone future events. Even if the climate is changing, agriculture has in the past been shown to be extremely adaptable and will not suffer negative consequences.

This bill may lead to future fee increases for the emitters of greenhouse gasses if the center is not properly funded through donations.

Testimony Against: (Appropriations) None.

Testified: (Agriculture & Ecology) (In support) Donna Ewing, League of Women Voters Washington; Toni Potter, Audubon Society; Grant Nelson, Association of Washington Businesses; Linda Johnson, Washington Farm Bureau; Brian Carpenter, Rebound; Paul Nee, Washington Association of Conservation Districts; Jake Fey, Washington State University Energy Program, Joe Heinek, Heineck Associates; Danielle Dixon, Northwest Energy Coalition; and Heather Rhoads-Weaver, Northwest Seed.

(Opposed) Grant Nelson, Association of Washington Business; and Linda Johnson, Washington Farm Bureau.

Testified: (Appropriations) None.