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On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Energy and Environment

Measure: SB803

My name is Melanie Plaut. I am a retired OB/GYN physician, and I work at the intersection of health and climate.

I would like to explain why there is NOT unanimous support for this bill among climate advocates.

I would consider myself a skeptic about the wisdom of encouraging a market in this type of fuel.

It has been said that one of our biggest challenges right now is to distinguish between those climate solutions which are:

Actual solutions

Promising ideas

Silly distractions

Dangerous delays

I have a concern that “renewable” diesel may fall into one of the latter categories, for the following reasons:

1. It may not help climate change. I would remind you that the carbon intensity of a fuel is not an inherent property of the liquid, but rather depends on modeling which includes multiple factors like how the crops/feedstocks are grown, and the market effects of increasing fuel supply (lowering cost which leads to more use). . Different models will give you different answers, in other words there is a great deal of uncertainty about the actual climate benefit. (See Richard Plevin’s testimony).

2. It may create perverse incentives. We have been down this road before with other biofuels. You may remember there was great enthusiasm for corn ethanol, during the (pre-fracking) era when gasoline supplies were at risk. But recent studies suggest it has little if any climate benefit, and now 30% of all corn is grown for vehicles, taking away cropland from food supplies, and creating incentives to clear forests and grassland which might have a higher use in carbon sequestration. The stocks for renewable diesel (especially at the CI in the bill, set at 60) will almost certainly rely on purpose-grown crops; and even if palm oil is excluded - since these food oils are fungible commodities - it may indirectly increase palm oil use.

3. It may compete with electrification. We see this now with the incentives passed in 2018 (SB98) for “renewable” natural gas. This bill was promoted by the “natural” gas industry, and they are now using it as an argument against home electrification, and

a reason to prolong the use of fossil methane in homes. (Promoting RNG also creates perverse incentives, by making it more lucrative for factory farms to increase their methane production, rather than use well-known techniques like management of feed and manure to decrease methane production.)

It is quite possible that SB803 could do a similar thing with diesel: since there is an off-ramp for any decrease in supply or increase in costs, there will be little incentive for fleet or truck owners to move to electric options as they become available, and there may be a prolongation of the use of fossil diesel.

4. It may distort action in local facilities inappropriately by encouraging this market. There are two local examples right now: One, the NEXT proposal in Port Westward, which would use large amounts of fracked gas for the refinery, damage the local organic farming industry, and put a critical bend in the Columbia River at risk for environmental damage in the event of spill, fire, or earthquake. Two, the Zenith Energy facility, which the City of Portland is allowing to continue to bring in crude oil by rail through Portland neighborhoods (think East Palestine, Ohio, or Mosier) for five more years because they promise at the end of that period to transition to renewable diesel.

The one argument in favor of SB803 which makes some sense to me is that it would improve air quality, since it is true that in older vehicles RD creates less air pollution than fossil diesel. Apparently it does not make much difference in trucks which are equipped with modern technology.

I sincerely believe that there may be better solutions for the “old truck” problem. We don’t need to encourage a new industry which will oppose electrification, be unlikely to help the climate, and prolong the use of fossil fuels.