

Submitter: Satya Austin-Opper

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Energy and Environment

Measure: SB870

Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Findley, and members of the committee, my name is Satya Austin-Opper and I live in Bend.

I support SB 868, 869, 870, and 871 because I grew up in a family that lived paycheck to paycheck, struggling to pay our bills every month. We lived in a rental home because my parents could not afford to own their own house. Because we were renters we had no choice in what appliances our house was equipped with, like our gas furnace. Our gas furnace was expensive to run and often we had to forgo turning it on to save money. This meant that a family with 4 kids had to go without heat in their home during the winter because of the high costs of gas appliances and the lack of choice that poor people and renters have. Heat pumps can lower bills by up to 3 times compared to other heating sources. Heat pumps can also offer cooling in the summer, which is most definitely not something that my family's gas furnace could do, meaning we were cold in the winter because our bills were too high and hot in the summer. Gas is more expensive than we can afford and the costs are skyrocketing. NW Natural Gas– the largest fossil fuel company in Oregon– increased rates more than 40% in 13 months. Meanwhile, the cost of renewable electricity, like solar and wind, is falling. It is up to our elected officials to protect renters and low income families from expensive, archaic, and unhealthy infrastructure in our homes.

In addition to the higher utility costs for consumers, methane is 25 times more effective at trapping heat in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide. Allowing the use of methane in our buildings is contradictory to our states climate goals and emissions reduction target. The effects of the climate crisis disproportionately impact people of low income and people of color. We need legislation in place that is designed to protect our vulnerable community members, not protect the status quo and private industry.

Though demand is slowly making it more cost effective to install heat pumps instead of gas infrastructure, we cannot wait for the market to be the sole driving force in this energy transition. It is the responsibility of our elected officials to protect its residents, especially their constituents living in poverty, from the health effects, environmental hazards, and higher cost of gas.

Thank you for your consideration of this important bill package.

Satya Austin-Opper, 24  
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