

Submitter: Helena Birecki

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Energy and Environment

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB88

Dear Chair Sollman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this Personal Testimony separate and distinct from the testimony I submitted on behalf of Climate Reality Project Portland Chapter.

SB 88 is one of a suite of bills before the legislature this year, including HB 3081 “One Stop Shop 2.0” and HB 3546 “the POWER act,” that will make a real positive difference in energy affordability for Oregonians.

Investor owner utilities aren’t trying to keep rates affordable; in fact, they prioritize maximizing profits. That’s why public utilities commissions exist — and need better tools— to balance corporate profit with the needs of the public. Please help the PUC do that better:

Please pass SB 88 so they can’t use my and my neighbors’ money for lawsuits, advertisements, and other “junk” that are contrary to family budgets, and also to my and my neighbors’ values, interests, present health and future wellbeing.

I strongly support climate protection and reducing pollution. A majority of Oregonians feel the same, including agreeing that both our government and corporations should do more to address global warming (<https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/visualizations-data/ycom-us/>).

Yet what did NW Natural and other gas utilities do when Oregon’s Department of Environmental Quality put together a Climate Protection Program? Sue. They sued to overturn a state program that had majority support. Then they tried to use rate-payer dollars to cover their legal fees.

That’s not “freedom of speech”— in fact I’d say it’s closer to extortion. Utilities aren’t “competitive” companies. Ratepayers are stuck: we can’t change utilities like I’d change where I buy a sandwich if I oppose their politics.

If utilities aren’t trying to pass dubious costs onto ratepayers, they have nothing to fear from SB 88.

In fact, the certainty SB 88 would provide about which costs will be covered by ratepayers and which costs must be covered by shareholders seems like it should

save both the utilities and Oregon PUC employees large amounts of time in rate cases.

Please see through the slick lobbying talk of the utilities, and do the right thing for your constituents.

SB 88 is good, efficient government. Please pass it.

Sincerely,
Helena Birecki
Portland, OR

PS: If gas companies feel threatened because gas is significantly less efficient and more health-harming than heat pumps and induction stoves, then maybe gas utilities should be working with government to ensure a Just Transition. Efficient technologies like thermal energy networks and/or grey-water recycling require the specialized skills of the plumbers and pipe fitters who currently work with natural gas.

Trying to convince people that expensive explosive gases are good for us is, in the long term, a waste of everyone's time, money, and future.