

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6619

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Environment, Energy & Water, February 8, 2002

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: Senators Poulsen, Jacobsen, Fraser, Morton, Regala and Kline.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Environment, Energy & Water: 1/29/02, 2/8/02 [DPS, DNP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY & WATER

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6619 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Fraser, Chair; Regala, Vice Chair; Eide, Jacobsen and Keiser.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Hale, Honeyford, McDonald and Morton.

Staff: Andrea McNamara (786-7483)

Background: The study of climate impacts investigates how climate, natural resources, and socioeconomic systems affect one another. While a number of efforts are underway to determine the likely effects of climate change on Washington's water supply, agriculture, natural resources, coastal infrastructure and public health, there is currently no centralized location for this research or formal collaboration among the researchers.

Climate scientists generally agree that humans are changing the climate through the addition of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. The combustion of coal, oil and gas is generally viewed as the most significant human activity that contributes to global warming and climate change.

According to a recent report commissioned by a number of the region's utilities and economic development agencies, the Pacific Northwest is poised for global leadership in the clean energy technology industry. The clean energy industry has already emerged as a \$1.4 billion business in the Northwest, and growth is expected to top \$4 billion a year and create 12,000 jobs over the next 20 years without any additional government intervention or support.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The establishment of the Washington Climate and Rural Energy Development Center (the Center) is authorized to serve as a central, non-regulatory clearinghouse for climate change and clean energy activities in the state.

The Center is established within the Washington State University Energy Program (WSU Energy Program) and is funded through grants, voluntary monetary and in-kind contributions.

The duties of the Center are outlined and include a variety of studies, data collection, and analysis. Specifically, the Center must:

- determine current and projected emissions of greenhouse gases in the state;
- collect and share scientific and technological data related to climate change;
- collect and share information that could be used, on a voluntary basis, to respond to potential impacts;
- collect and share information about clean energy activities in the rural areas, and advise relevant sectors of prospective commercial activities;
- collect and share information about methods for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the state;
- study and advise the Legislature on the potential impacts of climate change and the effects of early actions by the state, before action by the federal government or other state governments on the state's competitive position;
- research and provide information about mitigation projects, including programs for the commercial exchange of emissions credits;
- accomplish other duties assigned by the Legislature, and provide an annual report to the Governor and Legislature.

Within available funds, the Center must also:

- identify key sectors within the state likely to be adversely affected by climate change;
- examine and report on the feasibility of a carbon storage program for the state; and
- publicize mitigation projects and emission reduction efforts that include evaluations of whether those efforts were deemed successful.

Several state agencies and programs must assist the Center in its duties, including the Departments of Community, Trade, and Economic Development; Ecology; Transportation; Health; Fish and Wildlife; Agriculture; Natural Resources; and the WSU Energy Program. The Center must also establish task forces and technical advisory groups as necessary to assist in its duties. The Legislature may establish a legislative oversight committee consisting of one member from each legislative caucus.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute removes from the intent section conclusions about climate impacts, and substitutes intent to provide a clearinghouse of impartial, unbiased source of credible information. It also adds a definition of "clean energy activities" (about which the Center may collect and share information). The substitute directs the Center to be established "in" the WSU Energy Program (rather than "under the auspices of") and clarifies that its purpose is to serve as a non-regulatory clearinghouse of credible and reliable information. The substitute deletes authority of the Center to receive any fees related to mandatory or voluntary emissions mitigation programs, modifies the duties of the Center and removes the section encouraging emitters of greenhouse gases to voluntarily reduce emissions. It authorizes the Legislature to appoint one member from each caucus to serve on a legislative oversight committee for the Center.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: July 1, 2002.

Testimony For: The Center would provide a great help to the public and policy makers that struggle to make sense of all the information about global climate change and how it might affect Washington. The WSU-Energy Program is well suited to house the Center as it already has an excellent relationship with the federal government on climate change issues and a proven track record of providing clearinghouse and informational services to the general public about a range of energy-related matters. Washington should not wait for federal or national leadership on climate change issues but should take a proactive approach to understanding them and responding to them.

Testimony Against: (Original Bill) Washington State action on climate change needs to be carefully coordinated with federal and national policy, not in advance of it. Business interests are willing to work toward a neutral position on the creation of a Center so long as it does not have regulatory or directive authority and does not presuppose certain conclusions about what should be done about potential climate impacts.

Testified: PRO: Sen. Erik Poulsen, prime sponsor; Mark Foutch, Mayor Pro Temp for City of Olympia; Dave Sjoding, WSU-Energy Program; Linda VarNouy, NW Council on Climate Change; Donna Ewing, League of Women Voters; Sharon Karaneff, Alcoa. CON: Grant Nelson, AWB.