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## Gas Utilities Attempt to Delay Clean Energy Transition

**SALEM, OR.** – A broad coalition of business, environmental justice, labor, intertribal, and public health organizations filed legal briefs on Wednesday pushing back on the oil and gas industry’s attempt to roll back Oregon’s health and climate protections. Altogether, 15 organizations joined the defense against the fossil fuel industry lawsuits attempting to stop the state’s Climate Protection Program.

*“With climate impacts like extreme heat, wildfires, and drought threatening the health, safety, and livelihoods of farmworkers and others on the frontlines of the climate crisis, we are counting on action from the state to reduce climate pollution and protect our communities,”* said **Ira Cuello Martinez, Policy and Advocacy Director at PCUN**, Oregon’s farmworker, and Latinx union. *“We are proud to join with partners in standing up against the fossil fuel industry that has for too long harmed our people and our planet.”*

Under the Climate Protection Program, gas utilities and oil companies, and other large Oregon emitters must reduce their greenhouse gas emissions to a safer level, achieving a 50% reduction by 2035 and 90% by 2050. NW Natural, Cascade Natural Gas, the Western States Petroleum Association, and other fossil fuel industry proponents sued the state last year in a fraught attempt to derail the program after an extensive public process showed broad support for it from across the state.

Over 7,600 comments were submitted during the 2021 rulemaking process, and more than 70% were firmly in favor of the proposed program, which went into effect last January. It is yet to be known when the Court of Appeals will make a ruling on the lengthy, expensive, and unnecessary lawsuit. In the meantime, the Climate Protection Program is moving forward.

The destruction caused by climate-fueled wildfires, droughts, and heat waves in Oregon have price tags in the billions of dollars. As the State found in its assessment of the Climate Protection Program, the failure to achieve the program’s pollution reduction requirements may be higher than the state’s economy can bear. The Sixth Oregon Climate Assessment, published last week by the Oregon Climate Change Research Institute, underscores the dangerous impacts climate change poses to Oregon’s economy, particularly to farming and timber economies. The assessment also highlighted that Oregon’s tribes and other communities on the frontlines of climate change are disproportionately harmed by climate extremes and associated negative health and economic effects.

*“The gas utilities and oil industry are using the courts as a desperate, last-ditch attempt to protect their stuck-in-the-past business model that relies on climate pollution and high prices. They’re claiming that climate pollution isn’t actually pollution, and the state can’t regulate it. That’s absurd, especially when Oregonians are facing ever-extreme and devastating climate impacts,”* said **Nora Apter, Climate Program Director for the Oregon Environmental Council**. *“The state has not only the legal right but the moral responsibility to rein in climate polluters. But as they have done time*

*and time again, the gas and oil industry is wasting taxpayer dollars to fight common-sense protections. We are united in our efforts to keep Oregon on track to reduce climate pollution and protect public health and the clean energy economy.”*

Last September, the Oregon Court of Appeals granted **Beyond Toxics, Climate Solutions, Environmental Defense Fund, Oregon Business for Climate, Oregon Environmental Council, and Natural Resources Defense Council** the right to be parties to the case and help defend against the fossil fuel industry’s attack. In legal briefs filed alongside the Environmental Quality Commission last week, the intervenors point out the frivolousness of the industry’s arguments.

“It is imperative that the state hold firm in its progress toward growing clean energy industries that create local, high-quality jobs while improving our environment at the same time,” says **Tim Miller of Oregon Business for Climate**, another of the original intervening groups. “We are tremendously excited that so many business interests and varied entities are joining us to defend the right for our state to do the right thing.”

Joining the case this week in amicus filings were: **Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, Northwest Environmental Defense Center (NEDC), Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN), NAACP Eugene-Springfield, Verde, Community Energy Project, Rogue Climate, Oregon Public Health Association, Our Climate, Columbia Riverkeeper, Neil Kelly, SERA Architects, Indow Windows, New Seasons Market, and Friends of Family Farmers**. In their filings, they point out that the state has an obligation to protect communities against the health and economic impacts of climate change and the immense benefits Oregon stands to gain by maintaining a strong Climate Protection Program.

“Without the Climate Protection Program, Oregon youth do not have a healthy future,” said Grace Doleshel, Pacific Northwest Field Organizer for the youth-led organization, Our Climate. “Young people stand to benefit most from climate protections and have the most to lose if NW Natural and their industry allies succeed in rolling back the Climate Protection Program.”

Oregon’s clean energy leaders and advocates point out that market forces and consumer desires have shifted and are moving away from fossil fuels. They also highlight the important role of the State and the Climate Protection Program in creating economic opportunities for Oregon to become a leader in producing innovative, in-demand technologies that the entire world is seeking in the transition to a clean energy economy.

This broad group is joined by leaders in Oregon’s legal community, including **Crag Law Center, Willamette Law Group, Northwest Environmental Defense Center, Western Environmental Law Center, and Earthjustice**, who donated time and expertise to defend the Climate Protection Program by pointing out the specious arguments made by the fossil fuel industry and their co-petitioners.

All the briefs can be read here: <https://crag.org/climate-protection-plan-legal-briefs/>