



Testimony in OPPOSITION to H.B. 5004: An Act Concerning the Implementation of Certain Climate Change Measures

Submitted by David Flemming, Director of Policy and Research

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Environment Committee on H.B. 5004. My name is David Flemming, and I am the Policy Director for Yankee Institute, a non-profit public policy organization in Hartford dedicated to empowering Connecticut residents to build a vibrant, hopeful future.

Last summer, the local, national and international media reported on half of my home state going underwater in the Great Vermont Flood of 2023. The devastation angered me because, a decade ago, Vermont faced Hurricane Irene in a similar fashion. After Irene in 2012, many Vermont legislators responded with promises to reduce carbon emissions. This strategy did nothing to reinforce bridges and dams, or move vulnerable Vermonters out of floodplains, left helpless to the Great Flood.

I want Connecticut to avoid Vermont's head-in-the-sand thinking when natural disasters inevitably come. Every dollar spent on reducing Connecticut's carbon footprint or on costly litigation for carbon accounting, is a dollar that could have been used improving Connecticut's climate resiliency and public and private infrastructure.

This is one of several reasons Yankee Institute opposes H.B. 5004.

Connecticut residents and global experts agree that while climate change is a problem, it is not the "crisis" Section 1 of H.B. 5004 makes it out to be. Climate change is projected to only cost [2-4% of global GDP by 2100](#), according to the United Nations, when our descendants will have 450% more income. A [2023 Wesleyan SurveyLab CT Poll](#) showed that only 6% of Connecticut residents thought climate change was the most important problem facing the state, behind those prioritizing the Economy (26%), Taxes (17%), Crime & Violence (8%), Housing & Homelessness (7%) and Poverty & Inequality (7%).

Residents can clearly identify antidemocratic government overreaction to climate change. Last summer, [Yankee Institute's research](#) showed that 75% of respondents were against Connecticut's Department of Environmental Protection's (DEEP) proposed ban of the sale of new gas-powered cars by 2035. Despite this ringing rebuttal, Connecticut's DEEP Commissioner referenced those who "[overwhelmingly favored adoption](#)" in a letter recommending the ban to the Legislative Regulatory Review Committee.

If H.B. 5004 passes, Section 4 would invite organizations across the US to sue Connecticut, wasting badly needed state and private resources. H.B. 5004 proposes a 45% reduction of carbon emissions by 2030, which is quite impossible at the current rate of reduction. H.B. 5004 guarantees a lawsuit against Connecticut.

In 2016, the Conservation Law Foundation [successfully sued the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection](#) for not reducing emissions quickly enough to stand up to a 2008 law, and has promised to sue Vermont if it does not meet the 2025 mandate it passed in 2020.

According to Energy Information Data (EIA) data, Connecticut emitted [34 tons of carbon](#) in 2022, the 41st most out of 50 states (40th on a per capita basis). The world emitted about [38,000 tons of carbon](#) in each of the past 5 years, making Connecticut responsible for about 0.09% of global emissions. Consequently, if Connecticut were to achieve “net zero” by 2050 as H.B. 5004 demands, this would do nothing to make climate change more tolerable for Connecticut residents.

According to the [International Disaster Database](#), about 524,000 died from natural disasters annually from 1920-29, from a global population of 2 billion. This number declined by about 100,000 each decade until the 1970’s, finally leveling off in the 1990’s at about 40,000 deaths per year. Incredibly, the world population has grown more than four times larger during this time ([global population is expected to level off by 2100](#)). So on a per capita basis, you were *47 times less likely* to die from a natural disaster today than a century ago, on a global scale.

While the decline in natural disaster deaths in Connecticut is likely not quite so dramatic as the global decline, we can bet that it has been substantial. Since 1900, only three tropical cyclones have hit Connecticut, in 1938, 1944 and 1954. And none in the past 70 years, when climate change was *supposed* to be causing cataclysmic disasters across Connecticut, according to the most ardent alarmists. The 1938 hurricane left some 800 people died across Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York and Massachusetts. This massive reduction of natural disaster deaths globally and in Connecticut is a reason to celebrate!

Why have deaths from natural disasters declined so heavily? Because of the major improvements in quality of life on a global scale, we can afford to make investments in engineering, research and education to achieve feats never imagined 100 years ago. Globally, all countries can afford to invest more in the future, and coordinate far more easily to offer aid when natural disaster does strike. We can make natural disaster deaths decline even more by lifting the last billion people out of dire poverty, using the same tool we did for everyone else: economic growth.

Entrepreneurs worldwide have enabled us to slice natural disaster deaths so easily. [The helicopter, invented by Igor Sikorsky here in Connecticut 85 years ago](#), has helped millions of people across the globe escape natural disasters when no other form of transportation was capable. We owe much to the entrepreneurs who have found ways to save lives through ingenious inventions. All they ask is a small fraction in profits relative to the benefits they have given us. These achievements have been made possibly by the plummeting cost of transportation and electricity over the century, as humankind has learned to harness the potential of fossil fuels and other forms of energy. Forcing a global energy transition before we are ready could cost millions of lives.

In 2021, Massachusetts undersecretary of climate change [David Ismay resigned from his post](#) after testifying before Vermont’s Climate Council, a government body. Ismay noted that most of Massachusetts emissions come from residential heating and passenger vehicles, or “you, the person on the street, the senior on fixed income.... there is no bad guy left, at least in Massachusetts, to point the finger at, turn the screws on, and break their will so they stop emitting... That’s you, we have to break your will, right. I can’t even say that publicly.”

And there is the ugly truth, expressed often behind the closed doors of climate activism, but rarely in public: to make climate change the state’s primary focus, we’ll have to be willing to sacrifice lower income residents to this brave new carbon-free world. But that is a world we should not be chomping at the bit to live in.

If there was one thing politicians of all stripes could agree on from last month's Tax Incidence Report, it was that we shouldn't burden Connecticut's poor with more regressive taxes. And that is precisely what would happen if H.B. 5004 passes. The Legislature would be forced, under threat of litigation, to enact a tax on heating oil or natural gas or a tax on gasoline, or other zany proposals thoughtful legislators in tune with their constituents would never dream of enacting. And that is the strongest reason why you should not pass H.B. 5004.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony before this distinguished committee.

Respectfully submitted,

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