

Submitter – Philip H. Carver, Ph.D.
On Behalf of the 350 Salem Oregon
To the Senate Committee Natural Resources and Wildfires
Hearing of Feb, 5 2026

Topic: SB 1541

Greetings Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Nash and members of the Committee,

350 Salem Oregon supports SB 1541

350 Salem is a grassroots volunteer organization with hundreds of members advocating for a just transition to a renewable energy economy and for community-based resilience in response to the climate emergency. **Please also see 350 Salem testimony from the other co-coordinator, Laurie Dougherty.**

Summary

The administrative cost of this effort will be roughly a million dollars and will likely net Oregon **billions in benefits to citizens, businesses and local governments**, a payout of over a thousand-to-one.

There are **only three ways to pay** for the damages in Oregon that fossil fuel companies have caused:

1. Families, businesses and local governments can pay,
2. The state can raise taxes to pay **or**
3. **The major fossil fuel companies that knew the damage their products would cause can pay part of the costs.**

Alternative #3 is the practical and the morally appropriate choice. The other choices will likely result in local government bankruptcies.

The Economics and Science behind SB 1541 are solid

I worked for 37 years as a senior economist/policy analyst for Oregon Dept. of Energy and as staff to the Public Utility Commission (1980-2017). My work focused on energy efficiency, renewable generation, the science of climate change and ways to reduce fossil fuel emissions. I received a Ph.D. in Natural Resource and Utility Economics from John Hopkins U. in 1978. I have followed the science and economic issues around climate change closely from 1990 to today.

The Major Oil Companies knew about the effects of climate change

Fossil fuel companies knew about climate change and the types of climate disasters well before 1995. From the late 1970s and through the 1980s, Exxon, one of predecessors of ExxonMobil, had a public reputation as a pioneer in climate change research (from LA Times article cited as #18 in

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ExxonMobil_climate_change_denial).

The collection and distribution of money from fossil fuel companies is very doable and appropriate as was the case with tobacco companies.

Both knew they were selling a deadly product and hired “scientists” and public relations people to obscure the truth. See:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merchants_of_Doubt by Naomi Oreske and Erik M. Conway (2010). In many cases the same “scientists” were hired to carry the message of doubt for both tobacco and fossil fuels companies.

When your neighbor damages your property or health, you are entitled to compensation. The law is on our side.

Zero Effect on Oregon Fossil Fuel Prices

In oral testimony at the hearing on Feb. 5 industry spokespersons stated that SB 1541 would increase fossil fuel prices in Oregon. **This is categorically impossible.**

The structure of collecting and disbursing money in SB 1451 is well designed. The money comes only from the roughly 100 largest fossil fuel companies that sold oil, gas and coal in Oregon. *“Fossil fuel business” means a business engaged in the extraction of fossil fuels or the refining of petroleum products.* Retail natural gas distribution utilities would not be covered. If one of their suppliers were covered, they can switch to a smaller supplier that is not covered.

Gasoline and diesel prices cannot be affected in any noticeable way because their assessment will not go up or down based on their level of sales. The cost of supplying their products will be unaffected. These kinds of costs are what determine prices. Also, they have to compete with the smaller fossil fuel companies **so they cannot raise their prices.** (See also the oral testimony in the Feb. 5 hearing by the Nobel Prize winning economist Joseph Eugene Stiglitz, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Stiglitz)

The people who will pay for the assessment will be the shareholders of fossil fuel companies, who have been reaping the ill-gotten dividends and increases in share prices for years. They will see dividends fall and share prices decrease under SB 1541.

Attribution Science (attributing a specific event to fossil fuel emissions)

According to “Scientific American” (June 2023 see

[https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2025R1/Downloads/PublicTestimonyDocument/1937](https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2025R1/Downloads/PublicTestimonyDocument/193732)

[32](https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2025R1/Downloads/PublicTestimonyDocument/193732)) “A decade ago [before 2023] the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said attribution science was not yet ‘fit for purpose.’ In contrast, **a 2021 IPCC report called [climate] attribution science ‘robust.’**” IPCC, established in 1988, is the premiere worldwide organization for assessing climate change sciences and economics. Attribution science has continued to improve in the five years since the IPCC 2021 report.

The process is workable

Experts in Oregon agencies and consultants have the capacity to provide evidence-based estimates of the cost of Oregon’s climate damages from the largest fossil-fuel companies for 1995 through 2024.

We know each fossil fuel company’s responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions based on wholesale sales data from national and international sources.

The data and evidence is there to survive court challenges. Very similar efforts by Vermont and New York state have survived initial court challenges.

The process and priorities to disperse funds are well designed to fund projects throughout the state. Netting substantial funds from this effort is not guaranteed but **the state would be shirking its duty to not pursue this effort.**

The alternative to SB 1541 is likely future local government bankruptcies.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.