

By Shelby Friesz

Nebraska News Service

A report on the impact of climate change in Nebraska could be required from the Climate Assessment Response Committee if a bill to be heard by the Agriculture Committee is passed.

This bill (LB583), sponsored by Sen. Ken Haar of Malcolm, would also require a member of the High Plains Regional Climate Center, with the School of Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, to be on the committee.

Five people, including representatives of farm and environmental groups, testified in support of the bill, one testified against it, and one testified neutral to it. The Agriculture Committee also had one letter of support from the Nebraska Wildlife Federation.

The bill would add to an existing committee that meets twice a year to collect and share extensive data about climate change in Nebraska and how it affects the state.

Haar presented the bill, saying that the reports would be beneficial because of the extreme weather Nebraska has experienced lately. He quoted a Lincoln Journal Star article that said that 2012 was the hottest year on record.

The report that would be required of the committee would provide long-range data to help people prepare for these extreme climate changes.

Clint Rowe, a professor of earth and atmospheric sciences at UNL, said part of the change in climate is due to increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere since the Industrial Revolution.

He said that if people stopped using fossil fuels today, the carbon dioxide currently in the atmosphere would remain for at least another 100 years.

"We need to start considering how to adapt to the impacts of the change that are occurring and work diligently to ensure that we are not making problems even worse," Rowe said.

Michael Hayes, a professor at the School of Natural Resources at UNL, is a member of the current Climate Assessment Response Committee and spoke in support of the bill.

He said the committee is in a unique position to foster a dialogue and prepare people for the state of the climate in the future. He added that while there may not be much people can do at the present, they make a difference by preparing for the future, which the committee helps to do.

John Hansen, president of the Nebraska Farmers Union, said climate change, especially the extreme drought of 2012, has had a great impact on Nebraska farmers and ranchers.

"We couldn't possibly be more vulnerable as we go into this next growing season," he said.

He said that the more information the committee could provide in its report, the better Nebraska farmers could begin to move forward.

Ken Winston with the Nebraska Sierra Club echoed this by saying that the whole state depends on agriculture for the success of the economy.

"When people make money in Ogallala, that helps people in Omaha," he said.

Sen. Tom Hansen of North Platte, however, questioned how climate change affected weather trends, especially with the drastic change between 2011 and 2012. He said Nebraska has always been a state of extremes, such as having a cold, wet year in 2011 and a dry, hot year in 2012.

John Bellstorff, also with the School of Natural Resources at UNL, testified against the bill. He said he believed that there was a gap in representation of research about the climate change because it was mostly done by climatologists. He said he wanted more data and

experiments that would be balanced.

He also disagreed with the idea that the collection of data would have a beginning and ending point. He said that collection needed to happen continually to provide the necessary extensive data.