

February 16th, 2021

BILL: HB0033
TITLE: Climate Crisis and Education Act
POSITION: SUPPORT
HEARING DATE: 2/18/2021
COMMITTEE: Economic Matters
SPONSOR: Delegate David Fraser-Hidalgo

I want to thank members of both parties for their service and kind attention to my testimony about HB0033, in re Climate Crisis and Education.

I am Robert Whitehill, an Eastern Shore native of Chestertown, Maryland, and the author of the Ben Blackshaw thriller series set on Smith Island in our beautiful Chesapeake Bay. I am the beneficiary of an excellent public school education, beginning in first grade, with Eloise Johnson, Maryland Teacher of the Year in 1973. She taught this author how to read and write. I'd like to think she did it well.

In the interests of full disclosure, I also benefited from an excellent private college education beyond the means of most families, because it was paid for in part by many previous generations of my family who wildcatted in the oil industry starting from the Pennsylvania fields and reaching all the way to Oklahoma. I still receive a small amount of revenue from mineral lease holdings.

That blessing notwithstanding, I have watched flood tides wash the foot of High Street in my beloved Chestertown more and more often. I have seen average high tides cover entire blocks of the town of Ewell on Smith Island. After a long day of work, no doubt a few of you have crossed the top of Main Street on your way to the Drummer's Lot, and seen Ego Ally at the bottom of the street cresting its bulkheads to form a lake broad and deep enough to drown small businesses there.

The salt won't come at us solely across our shorelines. Without action, the ocean salinity will also rise into our inland fresh water aquifers.

You've seen the report cards on the Chesapeake's heath. I watched as a dear friend, a state employee taking samples of bay water, was forced into early retirement with lungs ruined by vibrio. As the summertime infectious season lengthens, the problem will only become worse. I don't have to tell you what Dermo and MSX have done to our oyster industry.

When we were kids, it was hammered into us that Maryland is America in miniature. We can lead the nation by what we choose to do here. We can also learn from what is happening in the rest of the country. This week 14 states are experiencing rolling blackouts because the grid was not designed with the foresight to sustain the energy demand of more frequent and violent cold snaps. Nowhere is this more ironic than in Texas, oil producer, oil refiner, and now literally powerless in the face of climate change.

Just fifty miles south of you in Lusby, we have Cove Point. Built to import LNG which might be seen as a loss, now reengineered to export and store it, which some see as a win. But we win every day when we are not beholden to fossil energy to keep the lights on, or for revenue. Let's not be Texas.

Can your vote influence national security? The United States economy is vulnerable because our fossil energy sector is vulnerable. Less than a year ago, eighteen Saudi supertankers carrying 36 million barrels of Saudi crude entered the Gulf of Mexico to glut our oil market because of *their* production quota dispute with Russia. It's not about American energy independence. It's about ending our unhealthy dependence on *fossil* energy sources at home and abroad. This bill will encourage a sensitive, pain-averse fossil energy industry to bulwark itself for the future by developing and scaling non-fossil, renewable energy sources. In the meantime, the CO2 offsets proposed in this bill will help today's students have the wisdom to follow what I hope will be your leadership in passing HB0033.

Bearing this in mind, I will close by saying that vast estimated and known oil reserves throughout the world make it clear that we will run out of planet before we run out of oil. Shifting away from fossil energy dependence will have to be our educated decision. Thank you again for your service, time, and attention.

For these reasons and more, I urge a FAVORABLE REPORT on HB0033.

Respectfully submitted,
Robert Blake Whitehill
Maryland Native, Author
rbwhitehill@comcast.net
(973) 809-3488

Cc: Members of the Economic Matters Committee