

Testimony of Father Hamm, S.J., in support of LR 455

before Executive Committee of the Nebraska Legislature 3/8/2016

I am Father Dennis Hamm, a Catholic priest of the Jesuit Order. A resident of Nebraska for over four decades, I have taught in the theology department of Creighton University for 38 years. Now retired, I am still affiliated with Creighton as professor emeritus of theology. I am here today as part of Omaha Together One Community, a coalition of 30 diverse congregations and community organizations, to testify in favor of LR 455.

My interest in agricultural and other environmental issues began when I wrote and taught a course I called “Faith and Food” from 1975 through the 80s. That experience helped this city boy learn that issues such as land and water and livestock management, the role of the family farm, the dynamics of international trade, the dangers of mono-cropping, analyzing who owns the land and how they make their choices—are all profoundly moral issues with powerful implications regarding social justice. Studying food brings home the truth of biblical wisdom. The earth is the Lord’s. The fruits of the Earth are meant to serve the needs of all, and for all time. The human creatures are not the owners but stewards meant to implement the universal destination of goods. Food ultimately is not a human product, but a fellow creature.

The leaves of green plants are the only life features on the planet that can turn the energy of the Sun into a form accessible to us and other animals. Everything is interconnected in a system whose source we call with a name like God. We didn’t need Pope Francis to tell us these things, but his recent letter on the Care of Our Common Home came along just in time to help us read the urgency of our own age, when the cry of the Earth in climate change and the cry of the poor are together reminding us that we are one human family and that our mismanagement of the earth is violating not only our environment but the unity of the human family itself.

The introduction of LR 455 also comes along at exactly the right time. It is the obvious next step following two other Nebraska responses to climate change. First, the University of Nebraska took the U.S. National Climate Assessment and applied it to the Northern Great Plains and produced the excellent study, available online, called *Understanding and Assessing Climate Change: Implications for Nebraska* (2014). Second, this fall, Dr. Don Wilhite and Rev. Kim Morrow have conducted stakeholder roundtables that did two things: (1) they provided well-crafted talks on “Implications for Nebraska” and (2) they elicited feedback from the stakeholder groups assessing the needs and resources of each sector with respect to the challenges they face in view of the predictable ongoing effects of climate change. (I was one of those attending the first such sector meeting--the one for faith-based communities--held in Lincoln.) The results of those stakeholder meetings—including videos of the lectures--are also now available online at <http://go.unl.edu/climatechange>.

As you know, both the UNL report and the roundtables recommended the creation of a climate action plan. In my opinion, the action urged by LR 455, namely to establish a special task force to create of framework for a plan related to climate change—entailing assessment of vulnerabilities, risks and economic impacts, and of creating strategies to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change—this is the obvious next step. Such a taskforce is absolutely essential for the Nebraska legislature to carry out its responsibility of attending to and promoting the common good. It seems right that this committee be composed of the seven persons described in the LR 455 and that they carry out the six tasks described therein during the ten months that remain in the calendar year 2016.