

House Research Act Summary

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Section 1 is a technical change to the energy omnibus bill contained in Chapter 85.

Section 2 increases the proportion of a public utility's gross operating revenue from residential customers that must be spent on programs to assist low-income natural gas customers with energy conservation efforts from 0.2 to 0.4 percent. It also directs that the program costs and resulting energy savings may, at the utility's discretion, be excluded from the calculation of the financial incentive the utility receives for its Conservation Improvement Program (CIP) activities for non-low-income customers. The reason is that the high costs of marketing these programs to low-income customers, coupled with the current low cost of natural gas, reduces the programs' cost-effectiveness. This provision insures that utilities are not financially penalized for operating these state-required low-income programs, or for spending more than the required amount on them, as some do.

Section 3 requires the Public Utilities Commission, when determining whether a utility has demonstrated in its integrated resource plan that a renewable energy facility is not in the public interest with respect to meeting future demand, to consider whether the plan helps the utility meet its renewable and solar energy standards and the state's greenhouse gas reduction goals.

Section 4 amends Minnesota's "Buy the Farm" statute, which allows an agricultural landowner whose land is condemned for the construction of a high-voltage transmission line to elect to have the utility purchase any amount of land contiguous to the portion needed for the transmission line, up to and including the entire property.

The act imposes time limits on actions that must be taken by the utility and the district court after a landowner has elected to require the utility to purchase additional land. It also specifies that it is the utility's responsibility to prove, as required by law, that the land the landowner elects to have the utility purchase is commercially viable. Finally, the act provides that landowners whose land is acquired under the "Buy the Farm" provision have all the rights and protections afforded landowners whose land is condemned under Chapter 117, where the bulk of Minnesota's eminent domain laws are codified.