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Senator Whitehouse Has Put Rhode Island's History at Risk

Preserve Rhode Island (Preserve RI) is deeply concerned about the proposed *Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act* (S. 5653) that passed cloture during Monday's Senate session. Rhode Island Senator Sheldon Whitehouse is a cosponsor of the bill.

The bill introduces provisions which remove protective processes for the environment, cultural landscapes, and historic preservation that have worked for decades to safeguard the places that matter to Americans. It does so in the service of faster approvals for pipelines, transmission lines, and other large-scale projects, both for renewable and traditional energy sources like coal and natural gas. And, not for nothing, the construction of data centers.

As recent events, including the midterms, have made very clear, the American public does not support unrestrained development over our natural and built environment. And we are deeply suspicious of the impact of data centers.

This bill, while it may, over time, reduce energy costs, does so at what is likely to be an immediate and unnecessary cost to our landscapes and neighborhoods. The bill's Democratic authors and supporters argue that these tradeoffs will not result in large scale damage to historic sites and landscapes, without offering evidence for this belief. At the same time, they suggest that the compromise is necessary to lower electric bills and support the production of clean energy sources.

Supporters also argue that the next few days are the time for those with concerns to propose amendments and edits to the bill to make it better, so that we can reap the energy rewards. There are two problems with this. First, the bill is loaded with poison pills that basically hand power to the federal government - this government - to subvert or ignore the best assessments of communities and local experts when evaluating the damage a proposed project might do. We are told by the Democratic co-sponsors that removing these provisions will undo the compromises that make this bill bipartisan.

Second, there are no guarantees that this Administration will honor the provisions of the bill that aim to support the development of clean energy sources. In the last few days, the President has urged Congress to pass the bill, at the same time that he announced he would prevent new wind power developments. Passing this bill would be giving a great deal away for no guaranteed return.

It is Preserve RI's belief that S. 5653 is fundamentally flawed, as is the notion that we must choose between low energy costs and protecting our history and environment.

We will have a new Democratic Congress in a few short weeks. Why is Senator Whitehouse, who has a long track record for supporting environmental protections, pursuing legislation that guts the National Environmental Policy Act and other regulatory protections? And, more importantly, why is he making concessions now when a newly Democratic majority is set to take power and can negotiate a more balanced and responsive bill to all concerns?

More information about the bill and its effects can be found on our website (www.preserveri.org).

Submitted on behalf of Ruth S. Taylor, Interim Executive Director of Preserve Rhode Island.

About Preserve Rhode Island

Preserve Rhode Island is Rhode Island's statewide advocate for historic places. The 70-year-old nonprofit provides guidance for local preservation groups, finds productive and adaptive reuses for threatened buildings, advocates for the revitalization of historic places to stimulate local economies, and engages the community through public programs at Lippitt House Museum.

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