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Veto grounds energy-saving program

Bill unfairly put cost on residents, Gov. Owens says

By Gargi Chakrabarty, Rocky Mountain News

For the second time, Gov. Bill Owens has vetoed a bill that environmental activists claimed would have reduced energy use and eventually customers' bills.

On Friday, Owens vetoed House Bill 1133, which directed utilities that deliver natural gas to launch energy-saving programs, including offering customers rebates for installing energy-efficient gas appliances.

The bill would have allowed Xcel Energy and other natural gas utilities to initially raise fees on residential customers to pay for the programs.

"HB 1133 exempts industrial and commercial users from increased rates and unfairly requires residential customers to pay the entire cost of the program," Owens said in his veto message.

He also noted that the bill would have excluded owners of newly built homes.

Those homeowners likely would have new energy-efficient appliances but wouldn't benefit from the programs, even though they would have to pay for them.

Xcel Energy - which serves 1.1 million gas customers along the Front Range - neither opposed nor supported the bill. Kinder Morgan, which has 71,000 customers along the Front Range, on the Western Slope and in northeast Colorado supported the bill after initially opposing it.

Owens had earlier vetoed HB 1162, which would have imposed energy-efficiency standards on 14 types of appliances, including gas heaters, commercial refrigerators, washing machines and air conditioners.

Environmental activists claimed the two bills would have saved customers \$1 billion over 15 years.

"This veto, as well as the veto of HB 1162 that would have stimulated the sale of more efficient appliances, is very unfortunate," said Howard Geller, executive director of the Southwest Energy Efficiency Project. "Governor Owens' right-wing ideology is preventing consumers in Colorado from saving over \$1 billion on their energy bills."

"House Bill 1133 was a win-win proposition for consumers and utilities in Colorado," he added.

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