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Congresswoman Matsui Introduces Energy Conservation Through Trees Act

Legislation Will Use Trees to Reduce Energy Demand and Costs, Improve Air Quality

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Congresswoman Doris Matsui (D-CA) introduced H.R. 2095, the Energy Conservation Through Trees Act, legislation that would support programs run by electric utilities that use targeted planting of shade trees in order to reduce residential energy demand. This legislation will help homeowners lower their electric bills – and help utilities lower their peak load demand – by reducing residential energy demand caused by the need to run air conditioners at a high level.

“The Energy Conservation Through Trees Act would help reduce energy costs for consumers and improve air quality for all,” said Congresswoman Matsui. “In my hometown of Sacramento, I have seen firsthand how successful shade tree programs can be. As we continue to present the twin challenges of high energy costs and the effects of climate change, it is essential that we put in place innovative policies and forward-thinking programs today that prepare ourselves for tomorrow. Expanding this local initiative to the national level can help ensure that we are working towards a cleaner, healthier future, and will be one piece of the puzzle in our fight to reduce our energy use and protect our planet.”

Patterned after the successful model established by the Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD), the Energy Conservation Through Trees Act seeks to save Americans significant amounts of money on their utility bills and reduce outside temperatures in urban areas because shade trees help to shield homes from sun in the summer. The program conducted by SMUD has been proven to lower energy bills, make local power utilities more cost-effective, and reduce air pollution. The bill contains a requirement that all federal funds provided as part of a grant program be matched at least one-to-one with non-federal dollars.

Planting shade trees around homes in a strategic manner is a proven way to lower energy demand in residential areas. According to research conducted by the Department of Energy, three shade trees strategically planted around a house can reduce home air-conditioning bills by about 30 percent in some cities, and a nationwide shade program could reduce air-conditioning use by at least 10 percent. Shade trees also help to:

- Improve public health and air quality by absorbing particulate matter;
- Store carbon dioxide to help slow global warming;
- Reduce the risk of flooding in urban areas by absorbing stormwater runoff;
- Improve private property values and increase residential aesthetics; and
- Preserve public infrastructure, such as streets and sidewalks.

“It is a simple plan really – to plant trees and create more shade for your home – and in turn lowering the energy use one needs to cool their home,” Congresswoman Matsui added. “But even small changes can yield tremendous results when it comes to energy efficiency and lowering consumers energy bills.”

“SMUD has supported the development of a sustainable urban forest through our program with positive results,” said SMUD Board President Renee Taylor. “We are honored that our Shade Tree program was used as the template for the enhancement of urban forests nationwide.”

Larry Greene, Executive Director of the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District (AQMD) said, “The Sacramento AQMD is very supportive of this bill since trees have well known benefits for the environment generally and air quality specifically. We have long worked closely with our advocacy agencies to add more trees to our region.”

Nancy Hughes, Executive Director of the California Urban Forests Council said, “Congresswoman Doris Matsui’s Energy Conservation through Trees Act addresses benefits for communities and ratepayers alike – lowering energy use through shading and cooling saves money and the need to produce energy at the power plant, consequently reducing emissions into the atmosphere and problems from air pollution impacting public health. This bill will create opportunities across the country to create more green jobs positively impacting the economy as well.”

“Planting shade trees serves as an effective approach to lowering home energy consumption, and we encourage members of Congress to follow Representative Matsui’s leadership,” said Nancy Somerville, Executive Vice President and CEO of the American Society of Landscape Architects. “Beyond lowering utility bills, trees can help increase property values, help prevent flooding by absorbing stormwater, and reduce the urban heat island effect.”

Peter King, Executive Director of the American Public Works Association, lent the Association’s support to the bill, saying, “APWA applauds Congresswoman Matsui for introducing this innovative legislation that will provide numerous air and water quality benefits that contribute the important quality of life for all members of a community and assist public works departments in improving air quality, reducing heat island affects and prevent stormwater runoff.”

“Alliance for Community Trees resoundingly supports this legislation and Congresswoman Matsui’s vision and leadership,” added Carrie Gallagher, Executive Director of Alliance for Community Trees. “We know people care about trees and about their pocketbooks. This legislation recognizes that trees not only beautify homes and our neighborhoods and improve individual property values, but they also save real, everyday dollars for homeowners and businesses by providing heat-beating, energy-saving shade. Trees are an integral part of creative green solutions to our country’s energy demands.”

Conserving energy through the use of strategically-planted trees is supported by the following organizations: Alliance for Community Trees; American Forests; American Public Power Association; American Public Works Association; American Society of Landscape Architects; California ReLeaf; California Urban Forests Council; International Society of Arboriculture; Sacramento Municipal Utility District; Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District; Sacramento Tree Foundation, and Utility Arborist Association.

A copy of the Energy Conservation Through Trees Act of 2011 is available [HERE](#) .

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