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To: Assembly Committee on Energy and Utilities

Re: Opposition to AB 401/SB 273

Although at first blush AB 401 and SB 273 look like good bills, the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin Education Fund opposes it. The bill inappropriately expands the definition of a renewable resource credit to allow electric utilities to take credit for what is properly classified as an energy efficiency, or energy conservation, measure. While we believe light pipe, or solar tube, technology is an important tool, it should be supported in a way that does not dilute our renewable portfolio standard.

Wisconsin's current renewable portfolio standard (RPS) requires electric utilities to increase the share of the electricity they generate from renewable resources so that 10% of Wisconsin's total electricity consumption originates from renewable resources by 2010. Renewable resources include such things as wind, photovoltaic systems, biomass, geothermal, and fuel cells. If a utility exceeds the required percentage in a year, it creates a credit (renewable resource credit or RRC) which it may use the following year or sell to another electric provider.

The Governor's Task Force on Global Warming recommended that the RPS be modified to require that the 10% requirement be moved up from 2015 to 2013, and that 20% by 2020 and 25% by 2025 be added to the law. The Task Force also recommended that the definition of a renewable resource be expanded to include the thermal portion of co-generation projects (i.e. projects that generate both heat and electricity), biogas, and solar hot water.

AB 401/SB 273 would amend the RPS to include the technologies already included in the task force's recommendation, but would add "solar light pipe" technology. Light pipes, sometimes known as solar tubes, are devices which direct outside sunlight to the interior of buildings without the use of electricity. We have a manufacturer of light pipes right here in Wisconsin that is a leader in the energy efficiency field. Light pipes are an exciting new technology that could dramatically reduce the electricity used by lighting in buildings.

Light pipes deserve to be supported and subsidized by the state, but don't belong in the definition of "renewable resource" and should not count towards a utility's requirement to sell an increasing share of electricity generated by renewable resources. To count them would weaken the current RPS by allowing utilities to generate less electricity from renewable resources than otherwise required, and could open the door to allow utilities to count everything a customer might use to conserve electricity or use electricity more efficiently (CFLs, more windows for daylight, motion sensor switches).

Light pipes help to maximize the use of natural light from the sun and reduce the need for electricity-powered lights. They are thus more properly classified as energy conservation, or energy efficiency, products. The Governor's Task Force on Global Warming recommended a significant increase in Wisconsin's investment in energy efficiency. Part of that investment should go towards supporting and subsidizing light pipe technology, along with other technologies and products that will help to conserve electricity or use it more efficiently. It is not necessary to dilute our RPS law to achieve that goal.