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editorial

Pass energy-conservation bills

In a time of rising fuel costs, ideas for saving energy become more important, so two proposals in the legislature are welcome.

Federal law sets minimum efficiency standards for major household devices such as air conditioners. But Congress hasn't updated the list of devices covered by the rules for more than a decade, so the country isn't taking full advantage of new energy-saving technologies. The job of encouraging manufacturers to produce efficient products has fallen to the states.

Under House Bill 1162, Colorado would adopt efficiency requirements nearly identical to those already embraced by California, Connecticut, Maryland and New Jersey. The standards apply to devices such as light fixtures, exit signs, reflector lamps, pool pumps, commercial refrigerators and freezers, icemakers and traffic signals. (Common household appliances aren't covered.) There would be no hardship on manufacturers, which just would ship to Colorado the same kind of devices destined for the market in the other four states.

There's no real opposition to the measure, co-sponsored by Democrats Sen. Ken Gordon of Denver and Rep. Alice Borodkin of Arapahoe County.

HB 1162 has passed the House and Senate and is headed to Gov. Bill Owens' desk. We urge him to sign it.

The legislature is also debating House Bill 1133, which could help Coloradans conserve natural gas - the fuel that heats most Colorado homes and runs energy-hungry appliances such as water heaters.

Sponsored by Gordon and Rep. Tom Plant, a Boulder Democrat, HB 1133 passed the House and gets its second consideration today on the Senate floor.

State law already enables utilities to help consumers save on electrical bills by controlling how much juice they use at certain peak times of the day. But the law doesn't let utilities recover the costs of offering similar assistance for natural gas, a big piece of most household utility bills- especially in the winter.

HB 1133 would let utilities recoup from customers the costs of offering programs to conserve natural gas. The concept is similar to the way utilities charge consumers for adding new energy resources such as power plants and gas pipelines. Efficiency should be thought of as another kind of energy resource, and one that helps clean the air.

Of the four investor-owned utilities covered by HB 1133, two (Xcel and Kinder Morgan) actively support it, while the other two (Atmost and Aquila) are neutral.

The Senate should approve HB 1133 and Owens should also sign it.