

**United States House of Representatives
Select Committee on the Climate Crisis**

**Hearing on May 20, 2021
“Powering Up Clean Energy:
Investments to Modernize and Expand the Electric Grid”**

Questions for the Record

**Donnie Colston
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The Honorable Kathy Castor

- 1. Mr. Colston, investments in transmission would benefit ratepayers across the country, increase reliability, create American jobs, and enable reductions in carbon pollution from the electricity sector. These widespread benefits suggest that modernizing and expanding the electric grid should be a goal that Americans of all political stripes can support. Should investing in transmission be part of bipartisan infrastructure legislation?**

Speaking for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the IBEW strongly supports the inclusion of federal investment in electrical transmission as part of a bipartisan infrastructure bill. Our electrical grid is one of the fundamental building blocks upon which the rest of our nation’s infrastructure, investments and innovations rely upon. It is critical that all Americans have access to safe, reliable electricity upon demand. This is not simply a matter of the convenience of turning on your television or electronic device. This can be a matter of life or death for Americans who need reliable electrical service to keep their oxygen machines on or who need regular dialysis services.

We have seen some of the unfortunate events in recent years that can take place when electrical service, both at the transmission and distribution level, becomes unreliable or when transmission lines need to be temporarily powered down due to the weather or when a regional transmission organization (RTO) or independent system operator (ISO) do not have enough tie-ins to neighboring electric power transmission systems. The IBEW believes the federal government can play an important role in providing the investments necessary to facilitate much needed transmission line construction that would avoid these recent blackouts, as well as update regulations that would help facilitate more privately-financed transmission construction.

Robust federal investment in transmission would also mean significant work for our members. Outline line construction and maintenance is difficult work that needs to be undertaken by trained professionals. This type of work, in addition, provides the types of middle class, family-

sustaining wages and benefits that have been called for by President Joe Biden and many Members of Congress as a key benefit of pursuing bipartisan infrastructure legislation.

- 2. Mr. Colston, the February 2021 winter storm in Texas and the mid-continent led to the freezing of critical equipment, power outages, and even deaths. The Southwest Power Pool (SPP) region was able to import power from the PJM Interconnection, which limited power outages. Unfortunately, Texas could not do the same because of much smaller ties to the other interconnections. Experts concluded that SPP would have been even better off had there been more transmission between PJM and the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) and between the northern and southern parts of MISO. Would building new transmission lines help increase the reliability of the grid?**

Without question, building new transmission lines would help increase the reliability of the North American electrical grid. In 2017, IBEW International President Lonnie R. Stephenson testified before the House Energy and Commerce Committee saying as such, “We need a truly national grid and new transmission lines that can safely and reliably transfer power – including renewables like wind and solar – from energy rich regions to those parts of the country most in need. And that means we need new transmission projects that will cross multiple jurisdictions and state lines.”¹ The IBEW continues to hold the same stance that additional transmission lines would provide greater reliability. It is our sincere hope that greatly federal investment in electrical transmission will help avoid future catastrophes, such as the February 2021 Texas blackouts that impacted millions of Americans, including a large number of our membership in the state.

- 3. Mr. Colston, we have hundreds of gigawatts of wind, solar, and storage projects stuck in interconnection queues. I am working on legislation to help reduce interconnection costs and clear out these queues through broader cost allocation and deployment of grid-enhancing technologies. I am also working on legislation to help develop new interstate transmission lines by providing technical assistance and incentives to state and local governments. How would consumers benefit from clearing out the interconnection queues for new wind, solar, and storage projects? Would federal technical assistance and incentives to state and local governments help speed up consideration of interstate transmission lines?**

In response to the question regarding Chair Castor’s legislation to help develop new interstate transmission lines by providing technical assistance and incentives to state and local governments, my written testimony states the following: “We are also supportive of the proposal to authorize federal funding for the Department of Energy to provide technical assistance for state, local and tribal authorities to conduct transmission planning and review applications of proposed transmission projects.” Technical assistance and incentives to state, local and tribal governments to develop new interstate transmission lines would enhance the safety and reliability of the electrical grid, allow additional renewable and low carbon generation to be added to the grid, and very likely put more IBEW members to work.

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In addition, the IBEW supports efforts to accelerate the construction of electrical transmission lines. One of the more significant issues to building additional electrical transmission is cost allocation. In 2019, the IBEW signed onto a multi-stakeholder letter, including the Edison Electric Institute (EEI), the Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA) and WIRES, regarding electrical transmission policy. Among the principles all the stakeholders agreed to was:

[T]he Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the U.S. Department of Energy, and state economic regulators should assess the need to improve upon and revise regulatory processes and corresponding regulations and policies governing the planning and cost allocation of high voltage electric transmission, balancing the public's interest in expedition, cost savings, care of the environment, and an equitable sharing of burdens.²

The IBEW still stands behind these policies in regards to improving and revising regulatory processes for transmission planning and cost allocation, particularly the principle of an equitable sharing of burdens. As such, we hope Chair Castor's legislation will uphold the principle of an equitable sharing of burdens when it comes to the cost allocation of electrical transmission.

References Page

¹ https://www.ibew.org/media-center/Articles/17daily/1702/170221_WhatIBEWandCongress.

² <https://wiresgroup.com/diverse-coalition-signs-statement-of-principles-on-modernizing-the-electric-transmission-grid/>
