

Representative Sean Casten
Illinois 6th District

Energy & Commerce
Subcommittee on Environment & Climate Change
Rep. Casten, Member Day Testimony
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Chairman Tonko, Chairman Pallone, members of the Committee, thank you for providing members the opportunity to share our thoughts on the work of this Subcommittee as you consider your priorities this Congress. This Subcommittee has perhaps a more important role than almost any other. The work this Subcommittee does this Congress will be pivotal in addressing the greatest existential threat to life on Earth, the climate crisis.

I appreciate your leadership and dedication in addressing this crisis head-on. I have been encouraged by the Committee's work to hold this administration and the EPA accountable for upholding existing climate policies, including the CAFE Standards. I also thank Chairman Tonko for his work developing his climate principles – an integral first step toward finding consensus within our caucus and across this chamber and I believe the document lays out many important ideas currently missing from conversations regarding climate policy.

If we are going to address the climate crisis, we must acknowledge certain facts that are politically difficult, but that must guide the course of action we take.

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The first is that the climate crisis is an urgent one. Regardless of what many of my colleagues may think, we do not have time to debate settled science, and we cannot avoid this issue. The climate crisis is here. The climate crisis is now. And every day we fail to act, the consequences of our inaction become more costly and more dire. Future generations of Americans, and those from across the globe, will remember how each of us responded now. It is up to us to put aside partisan disagreements and act as quickly as this body can possibly act.

But that does not mean that the problem at hand is not a complex one. It is. And it requires a complex solution. Any actions we take to address the climate crisis that is not predicated on this fact, will not be successful in the long run. We cannot allow ourselves to become deluded into thinking that because the problem is urgent, any action will solve the problem.

We cannot simply issue edicts from on high. We cannot shy away from expertise. And we cannot act with the purpose of scoring easy political points. These things may make us feel good but do so at our own peril. The urgency of this crisis demands we act with seriousness, determination, and in a measured and deliberative manner. In essence, to best address the climate crisis, I'd urge this committee to unleash the nerds.

This also means that the solutions to the climate crisis may not be exciting, sexy, or ready-made for primetime news headlines. Many of the solutions are already known. And many solutions are low-hanging fruit that we could enact tomorrow. But that's a good thing and a great opportunity.

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Some of these solutions build upon policies that are already working. For example, while CAFE Standards have helped increase the average fuel economy of our light-duty vehicle fleet, this committee should consider other policies like a feebates program that could build upon this success by rewarding consumers who buy more efficient, cleaner vehicles. The committee should also consider complementary policies to help get less efficient vehicles off the road – such as a cash for clunkers program.

Other climate policies have broad bipartisan support. For instance, members of both parties have agreed that we should prioritize the deployment and development of grid-scale energy storage technologies. These technologies will not only lower electricity costs for consumers but will make our grid more resilient and efficient, all while lowering greenhouse gas emissions. That is why I was proud to introduce H.R. 2909, the bipartisan and bicameral Promoting Grid Storage Act, alongside many members of the Energy & Commerce Committee. I'd urge the committee to take up and pass this measure.

Other solutions require we look back at existing laws with renewed scrutiny for how they have worked in practice. The Federal Power Act, for instance, makes clear that FERC should ensure that electricity rates are just and reasonable – and yet rates across the country fail to account for the devastating impacts and high costs of carbon pollution. While FERC has been hesitant to act to address this massive externality because some there believe they do not have the authority. This cannot be what Congress intended. And we should say so. Loudly.

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Of course, economy-wide measures should be undertaken to address the full scope of this issue. Preferably, these policies will embrace the principle of technology-neutrality and will resist the well-intentioned but misplaced dual urges to either craft a plan that pleases all but does little or the urge to reject any good plan in search of perfection. We cannot wait for perfect. We cannot please everyone. We need climate action. We need it now.

Not all of the solutions I have mentioned today fall solely within the jurisdiction of this Subcommittee or even the Energy & Commerce Committee as a whole. Yet, each illustrates the kinds of tasks we must be willing to take on if we are going to address the climate crisis. This task is urgent. This task is complex.

I hope the Committee will consider some of the proposals I have mentioned here today. And I look forward to working with any of you in any way I can to combat this crisis. Chairman Tonko, thank you again for having me here today and thank you all for your leadership.