

Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Whitfield
Subcommittee on Energy and Power
Hearing on “American Energy Security and Innovation: The Role
of a Diverse Electricity Generation Portfolio”
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(As Prepared for Delivery)

American electricity is like the American people -- our strength is in our diversity. And that is the topic of discussion for today's hearing, which is entitled "American Energy Security and Innovation: The Role of a Diverse Electricity Generation Portfolio."

Americans are fortunate to have a variety of electricity sources available to us. Each source brings its own unique mix of assets and liabilities. Some are inexpensive, while others are not. Some are reliably available 24 hours a day and seven days a week and ideal for baseload power, while others are not. Some can be quickly ramped up or down to match quick changes in demand, while others cannot. Some can be located almost anywhere, while others are geographically limited. Some can be easily integrated into the existing electric grid, while others would necessitate costly new infrastructure investments.

As a result, there is no one ideal means of generating electricity. The best approach for affordability and reliability is a broad mix of generation sources, be it coal, natural gas, nuclear, or renewables. Each source can serve a purpose in the electricity mix, and each has strengths that can compensate for the other's weaknesses. And the best way to strike the right balance is through market forces -- not government mandates or other market distorting policies.

Of course, Washington State is not Kentucky, and Kentucky is not Texas. The best generation mix will vary significantly from region to region, which is why Congress needs to be cautious about imposing one-size-fits-all measures such as federal renewable portfolio standards, and the EPA should be considering the impacts of its regulations on fuel diversity, especially as it relates to baseload power.

The ideal electricity mix will also vary over time. That is why we need the flexibility to allow the mix to change with the times and with the inevitable fluctuations in the price of various electricity sources. This is becoming increasingly important as EPA regulations limit the options of resources and technologies available for utilities.

The best way to deal with the electricity challenges of today and tomorrow is to expand the options available, not to reduce them. That is why I believe that EPA's regulatory assault on coal is bad policy. Coal is the leading source of electricity generation in the U.S., and it certainly remains the fastest-growing source of energy for China and many of our other global competitors. We gain nothing when we foreclose the option of new coal-fired generation by regulating it out of existence.

Government should not tilt the playing field against coal, nor should it tilt it in favor of other sources like wind and solar. The reality is that these non-hydro renewables are neither cheap nor reliable at the present time, which is why they are so heavily reliant on federal subsidies. The government should not be intervening on behalf of wind and solar or any other fuel source for that matter. Sound energy planning means that you don't rely on one energy source, in essence putting all of your eggs into one basket.

Federal policies should encourage an all-of-the-above approach to electricity production that takes advantage of all affordable domestic energy resources. Rather than pursuing policies that could limit the diversity of energy resources, the U.S. instead should be pursuing opportunities to transition to the most advanced generation fleet in the world, inclusive of all affordable and reliable resources and technologies.

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