

Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Whitfield
Subcommittee on Energy and Power
Hearing on “Benefits of and Challenges to
Energy Access in the 21st Century: Electricity”
February 27, 2014

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Today’s hearing will focus on electricity access, and the next hearing will deal with fuel supply and infrastructure issues. The unusually cold weather we have recently experienced across the nation underscores the importance of affordable and reliable electricity.

Nonetheless, under the Obama administration electricity access is being jeopardized by a number of already finalized or pending measures raising its cost. This includes pending global warming-related regulations from the Environmental Protection Agency.

Regardless of intention, I believe any policy that increases the price of energy runs a serious risk of doing more harm than good. And the first victims of misguided measures are the least fortunate in society, both here in the U.S. and around the world.

EPA’s rules threaten electric reliability as well as affordability. EPA’s rules are contributing to an unprecedented number of coal plant shutdowns that will occur in the next few years as environmental regulations take effect. Taking coal out of the equation means that America’s most abundant source of baseload electricity will have a diminishing role. The North American Electric Reliability Corporation’s most recent Long-Term Reliability Assessment and other studies have raised serious concerns about electric reliability in the near future. Among the EPA rules contributing to reliability problems are the Mercury and Air Toxics, or “Utility MACT” rule, that is accelerating the pace of coal-fired power plant retirements, and the proposed greenhouse gas New Source Performance Standards for power plants that would effectively ban any new coal from coming online. To address the latter, we need to enact H.R. 3826, the Electricity Security and Affordability Act, in order to keep new coal in our energy future.

America’s growing natural gas abundance is clearly a blessing, but the recent cold spells demonstrate that there are limits to the ability of natural gas to replace coal. In fact, it was necessary to increase the use of coal-fired generation to get us through the periods of high demand brought on by the very cold temperatures. This included many coal facilities scheduled to shut down in the next two years. We should look at this winter as an early warning that reliability is at risk.

Now I might add that it is not even necessary to be a global warming skeptic to be a skeptic of these policies. Even EPA administrator Gina McCarthy admitted to this committee that none of her agency’s costly global warming rules would make a measurable difference. In other words, the Obama energy agenda is all economic pain for no environmental gain.

And the pain will fall disproportionately on the poor, who are least able to handle higher electric bills. The unemployed are also hurt, as higher electricity costs slow the pace of job creation, and the war on coal is eliminating job opportunities in many communities.

The damage around the world from the administration’s climate policies could be even worse. 1.2 billion people still don’t have access to electricity. The last thing they need imposed on them is a costly climate agenda that puts the dream of electrification even further out of reach.

For this reason, I am particularly disappointed by the administration’s opposition to financing for new state-of-the-art new coal-fired power plants in developing countries, and I’m perplexed by the President’s insistence that he supports the goal of increased electricity access while also pursuing an uncompromising global warming agenda that effectively deprives people of such access.

Unfortunately, those seeking to advance a global warming agenda lose sight of the things that really matter. Today, we will refocus on what really matters - ensuring affordable and reliable energy for as many people as possible.

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