



COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY & COMMERCE
DEMOCRATS
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Pallone Calls for Investments in Energy Infrastructure

Washington, D.C. – *Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) spoke about the importance of making real investments in American energy infrastructure for the 21st Century at an Energy Subcommittee hearing titled, “Modernizing Energy and Electricity Delivery Systems: Challenges and Opportunities to Promote Infrastructure Improvement and Expansion.”*

Mr. Chairman, Democrats strongly support modernizing our energy infrastructure, much of which is either outdated, on the verge of disrepair, or inadequate to today’s needs.

In the last Congress, we agreed on the need to provide funding to bring our electricity grids into the 21st Century and to facilitate the repair of old, leaky gas pipelines that waste resources and pose significant safety and environmental threats. In fact, we had an agreement to provide a total of \$3 billion for a grid modernization grant program and a pipeline repair program modeled off the recommendations of the first installment of the Department of Energy’s Quadrennial Energy Review. Unfortunately, the House Republican Leadership, probably in response to the far right wing of the Republican caucus, opposed the plan. That led to the collapse of our bipartisan efforts.

Nevertheless, I am willing to try again. Infrastructure modernization is too important to our economy, to the public and to workers to become a partisan issue. And, if we do it right we can enhance the environmental performance of the energy sector and protect vital natural resources.

We need new and revitalized infrastructure to deliver energy, industrial feedstocks, and information safely, reliably, and efficiently. And it’s going to take a substantial investment to realize this goal. This can’t just become a package of deregulatory measures, tax giveaways to corporations and fake investments through “private-public partnerships.” We need new hardware, new software and new thinking –work that can and should be done in America by American workers for the benefit of all the American people. Our nation is filled with great minds and great technologies that can modernize our energy infrastructure to meet 21st Century needs. We can make our infrastructure smarter, more flexible, and more resilient. And, we can significantly improve its safety and environmental performance.

Most of us can agree that our country's energy infrastructure needs to be upgraded. Yet, the most important question today is not whether we invest in our infrastructure, but what types of infrastructure we prioritize. I firmly believe that we should be focusing on setting aside federal funding to repair our aging gas pipeline distribution system and looking at ways to upgrade our electricity transmission and distribution networks to enhance reliability and efficiency and to ensure sufficient power generation, particularly from renewable energy sources.

I am a big supporter of expanding renewable energy generation here in the U.S., but I understand that a massive transition to cleaner energy sources won't take place overnight. As long as we continue to use fossil fuels, pipelines can be the safest, most environmentally benign and economically efficient way to move these fuels. But pipelines are only a benefit if they are constructed, maintained and overseen properly. And they must be sited correctly, with due respect for the rights of tribes, local governments and individual property owners, as well as the environment. They must be constructed to high standards that ensure safety and protection of the communities and resources along their pathways. Federal permitting agencies have a critical responsibility to ensure that these pipelines don't jeopardize the land, water, habitat and cultural resources that surround them. So many of the problems we see with big pipeline projects like Dakota Access revolve not around the project itself, but the process for routing and constructing the line. We won't solve these problems with "streamlining." Instead, it will take discussion, understanding, respect and flexibility. That takes time, but it is time worth spending.

With regard to the siting of natural gas pipelines, we need to not only modernize our infrastructure, but also the law that governs its construction. The Natural Gas Act allows for the taking of private land in the name of public convenience and necessity. That power was an important one when we were building pipelines to bring critical fuel to power plants and heat to homes. But now it is time to examine whether that power should be available merely to bring higher profit margins to some operators.

These are important issues and this is a critical time to examine and plan for our future needs. Our past investments served us well for over a century. Now, however, we face new conditions and new challenges including climate change. To retain our economic strength and robust job base, we need to get this right. Simply reinforcing old patterns of energy production, distribution and use won't take us where we need to go.

We want to work together to build the infrastructure that will deliver broad-based, public benefits well into the future. I hope we will not squander this opportunity to move forward. The time is now, the need is great, and we have the resources to get this done. We only need the will to do it.

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