

Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Energy
Hearing on “Modernizing Energy and Electricity Delivery Systems:
Challenges and Opportunities to Promote Infrastructure Improvement and
Expansion”
February 15, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

I said 2 weeks ago during our first Energy Subcommittee hearing that one of the humbling responsibilities for members of this committee is to fully appreciate the power we have to make policy changes that can have enormous and positive impact on American consumers for decades to come. And I reiterate that sentiment today as we begin our efforts to examine the challenges and opportunities to expand, improve, and modernize our energy infrastructure across the country. We will hear from builders, laborers, contractors, energy producers, concerned citizens, tribes, and utilities at the forefront of these issues. Our infrastructure is undergoing rapid changes on both the electrical and energy producing side but there is one thing uniting them both. These changes mean jobs.

On the first panel, we will hear from witnesses who will present a wide-ranging review of the technological developments in the electricity system. The U.S. electrical grid is one the engineering marvels of modern history. But it is aging and under stress. The vast network that arose to deliver seamless uninterruptable power into our homes, schools and hospitals in a centralized and standardized fashion is being tested and challenged by the intersection of digital technology and innovation. As technology continues to change the way we go about our daily lives, we also have to rethink how we generate, deliver and consume electricity. This could provide opportunities for consumers, both large and small to save money and be more competitive.

However, these opportunities do not come without their own set of challenges. We must strike a delicate balance of maintaining the reliability and security of the grid and ensuring ample power generation, regardless of the fuel source. We must ensure that the grid works in ways that optimize and build upon integrating new technologies with existing grid infrastructure, and siting new infrastructure when needed. I look forward to hearing the testimony of some of the leading entrepreneurs and research minds in this space to help create the electricity system of the future. I especially welcome our witnesses from the labor and contractor community, who stand to benefit with thousands of new jobs putting people to work doing what they do best.

On the second panel, we will hear from all sides that are affected by the country's record-setting liquid fuels production growth. This growth has brought about tremendous opportunities to make our nation more energy independent all while creating thousands of jobs. At the same time, concerned citizens have come forward with their worries about the potential environmental impacts from new projects. The Dakota Access Pipeline is currently at the forefront of those headlines, and we welcome before the committee our witnesses from both the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and the Dakota Access project developer, Energy Transfer Partners. We know this issue means a great deal to both parties involved, and we are here to listen. The committee welcomes all sides of the debate and looks forward to your testimony.

But the Dakota Access pipeline isn't the only project that is currently being challenged across the country. The impacts and delays brought on by increasing amounts of uncertainty do nothing to open up a productive conversation about the true risks and benefits of these types of projects. We want to learn from the

ongoing challenges presented to us today in order to bring more accountability, transparency, and predictability to the environmental permitting process. The sooner project developers and communities can talk about the risks and benefits within the community, the better. It's only by talking to each other that we will be able to move beyond rhetoric and do what's right for our communities.

As the committee implements its own energy policy agenda, the testimony we take today will inform how we approach the future and how we best use innovation and technology to protect American consumers. We can be good stewards of our environment while also pursuing policies to grow our economy; they are not mutually exclusive goals. We stand ready to listen and are excited to get to work helping create new jobs to reinvigorating our energy and electricity delivery systems, ultimately bringing consumers affordable American energy that is safe, secure, and efficient.

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