

Opening Statement of Chairman Fred Upton
Subcommittee on Energy “Building a 100 Percent Clean Economy: Solutions
for the U.S. Building Sector”
September 20, 2019

As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and to our witnesses for appearing before us today. Before we begin, I would like to call attention to a legislative matter that requires this Committee’s attention. Mr. Chairman, as you know, the Pipeline Safety Act is about to expire at the end of this month. We should remind everyone that this is a reauthorization bill that we have consistently passed with unanimous consent under Republican majorities. However, I am troubled by what appears to be a lack of willingness to work on a bipartisan basis this time around. We owe it to our constituents to do better, which is why Republicans are asking you to please, come back to the table and work with us so we can get this bill in shape for a full Committee markup.

Now, turning to the subject at hand. I would like to use today’s hearing to focus on real world solutions to improve the performance and environmental sustainability of our homes and commercial buildings. Thanks to innovation and technological advancements, we are making great strides to reduce energy consumption and enhance building performance – but we still have room for improvement.

As we consider clean energy solutions for the building sector at the Federal level, we must recognize that these high-performance, or “green” technologies are often much more expensive to design, build, and maintain. As policy makers, we need to take this into account, especially as we are confronted with declining rates of homeownership, increasing rental prices, and high vacancy rates in many American cities.

I firmly believe that cleaner solutions for the building sector must meet three core objectives. They must be affordable, they must be cost-effective, and they must be driven by consumer demand, rather than government mandates.

Housing affordability is my number one concern. It has been reported that housing affordability is near a 10-year low and public polling confirms 80 percent of Americans think housing affordability is in a crisis. With a large and growing share of American households having difficulty finding housing they can afford, this Committee should be focused on ways to make housing less expensive, rather than piling on more regulations and driving up costs.

I am also concerned about the cost-effectiveness of some of the proposals, such as those with “net zero” or “carbon free” mandates. We must be honest about the performance trade-offs, the higher upfront costs, and the number of years it will take to payback the difference. We must also look at the lifecycle of the product

and the building itself before jumping to a one-sized-fits-all regulation that picks technology winners and losers.

Finally, I believe that clean building solutions must be consumer-driven in order to be successful. Consumers know what they want, and they do not like the Government telling them what they can and cannot have. Americans demand high performance, cost-effectiveness, and most importantly, plenty of options to choose what works best for them. Experience has shown that consumers are turned off by expensive mandates, but they are more open to properly placed incentives. As we think about clean solutions for the building sector, I would challenge everyone to think about clean building solutions that truly add value to homes.

With that, I look forward to hearing from the witnesses to learn more about the types of clean building solutions that consumers are excited to purchase. I would also like to offer a special welcome to Arn McIntyre who traveled from the great state of Michigan to be with us today. Mr. McIntyre has a very interesting perspective: he is a custom homebuilder, a leader in energy efficient and environmentally friendly design, a State of Michigan building inspector, and he provides research and consulting to the building industry as a whole.

As I mentioned in the beginning, I plan to spend today's hearing focusing on affordability, cost-effectiveness, and consumers. I look forward to a constructive conversation, and at this time, I yield back the balance of my time.