

Opening Statement of Republican Leader Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Energy
“Building a 100 Percent Clean Economy: Solutions the U.S. Power Sector”
October 30, 2019

As Prepared for Delivery

Mr. Chairman, thanks for holding today’s hearing to examine the challenges and opportunities associated with modernizing our nation’s electric grid. I would also like to thank our witnesses for appearing before us today.

Today’s hearing is part of a series that the Majority is holding to identify the paths to decarbonizing the American economy by 2050. Last week, we heard the Chairman say that this “will be one of the most ambitious, challenging and necessary transformations our country has ever attempted.” While I believe in American ingenuity and hard work, the kind of transformation that the Chairman’s words suggests signals a radical upheaval of our energy systems at a scale that sounds an awful lot like the policies of the “Green New Deal.”

As policymakers, I believe we should be putting our constituents first. I also believe that we should be focused on pragmatic policy solutions, rather than catchy slogans, to ensure our constituents can have more affordable, more reliable, and more diverse options for electricity.

As I've said before, Republicans are ready to get to work on real solutions for the real problems facing our constituents today – the ones that they are talking about around their kitchen tables. Mr. Chairman, Green New Deal-style policies will be disastrous for grid security, jobs, and our economy. I urge you to work with Republicans and return to the bipartisan approach to electricity policies that we began together during our *Powering America* hearings last Congress.

The stakes are too high to go it alone. Our grid is facing many new and emerging challenges that have the potential to significantly impact grid reliability and increase prices for consumers.

Baseload coal-fired and nuclear power plants are closing around the country at record pace. We are relying more on natural gas for electricity than ever before, while pipeline bottlenecks and permitting challenges threaten the reliability of natural gas supplies. Electricity generation from intermittent renewable resources is also on the rise, which is straining the grid and, at times, distorting electricity markets.

As these trends continue, we will need a tremendous amount of new solar panels, new wind farms, more electricity storage, and more high-voltage transmission lines. We will also need more natural gas pipelines, and the industry must develop commercially viable grid-scale

storage and advanced technologies for distributed energy resources and demand response.

We must also deal with serious physical threats, cyber threats, severe weather, and wildfires. Over the last several weeks, millions of people in California have had their power disconnected as the electric utility struggles to deal with high wind and wildfires.

While some are saying that California's environmental policies are partially to blame for forcing the utility to redirect resources away from basic maintenance, and for making it difficult to manage vegetation along rights-of-way, the fact of the matter is that people are suffering and a one-sized-fits all climate policy won't solve it.

While I am aware that some investor-owned utilities are setting ambitious climate-related goals – often as a result of activist shareholders – there are important caveats.

In many cases, these plans rely on an expensive price on carbon and new technologies that haven't even been invented yet. These plans also rely on a strong nuclear fleet, increasing reliance on natural gas, a lot more wind and solar, and the development of commercially viable grid-scale storage.

While it's nice to have these aspirations, we must be honest about the challenges to grid resilience and reliability, and we must be transparent about the costs to consumers. What works for a utility in our coastal urban centers may not be a good fit for those in rural America.

Adapting to our changing energy landscape requires thoughtful consideration by Members of this Committee, which is why I take this issue so seriously.

As I said last week, Republicans have [urged](#) our Majority colleagues to avoid resurrecting economically harmful, top-down regulatory policies that punish consumers with higher prices and fewer choices.

Republicans support innovation, conservation, adaptation and preparation. America can continue to lead the world in carbon emissions reductions if we stay true to the core principles that enabled our success.

I believe that over-regulating the power sector or imposing a carbon tax will hurt consumers—especially low-income and rural consumers—which will lead to economic stagnation.

We eagerly await the opportunity to work together on these important policies to encourage innovation, conservation and preparation. There's so much we could do together in this space to help consumers and reduce emissions.