

Opening Statement
Chairman Bobby L. Rush
Subcommittee on Energy
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on “Reviving our Economy: COVID-19’s Impact on the Energy Sector”
June 16, 2020

Good morning. Today, the Subcommittee on Energy convenes for a hearing as a continuation of the Committee’s work to address the impact of COVID-19 on our nation, its economy, and, most importantly, its communities. Historically, tragedies encountered by this nation have resulted in a deeper understanding of its essential needs. The novel coronavirus pandemic is no exception to this rule.

As an illustration, this pandemic has further demonstrated the need to eliminate the injustices suffered by minority, low-income, and other vulnerable communities. That is why I was pleased to join Chairman Tonko for a recent hearing on the unjust impacts of pollution and COVID-19 on these communities.

Today, it is the Subcommittee on Energy’s intent to examine the impact of this pandemic on one of our nation’s most essential sectors. The effect of COVID-19 on the energy sector is sweeping. At present, the sector has lost a total of 1.3 million jobs and stay-at-home orders have stunted electricity demand and pending projects.

The clean energy industry — which employs more people than any other industry within the energy sector — continues to stagger while enduring the sharpest of blows. At its recent height, the clean energy industry employed over 3.4 million Americans — growing 70 percent faster than the overall economy.

According to recent data, this industry — which includes energy efficiency, energy storage, renewable energy, alternative vehicles, and more — has lost over 600,000 jobs since March. Further, without intervention, forecasts suggest one out of every four clean energy workers may soon lose their job as a result of COVID-19. To put this into perspective, that is nearly a million hardworking American’s who are out of work.

As Chairman of the Subcommittee on Energy, it is my firm belief that sustaining and strengthening the clean energy industry is essential to the recovery of our economy and our communities. The foundation of my belief lies within the successful federal investment of \$90 billion in this very industry after the Great Recession. This is why I am proud to join Chairman Pallone and my colleagues in ongoing efforts to bring clean energy infrastructure legislation to the floor.

However, this does not mean that the clean energy industry, and the energy sector as a whole, should go on without change. According to the U.S. Energy and Employment Report, diverse groups are frequently underrepresented in the energy workforce. For example, African-Americans account for merely eight percent of the energy efficiency workforce.

Additionally, the Energy Information Administration reports one-third of U.S. households — most of which are minority households — struggle to afford paying their energy bills and have little access to energy efficient and clean energy technologies.

We know that there is clearly more work to be done. To be forewarn is to be forearmed. Therefore, if knowing is truly half the battle, then immediate action is now required. I look forward to today's discussion. And with that, I yield to my friend and colleague, the gentleman from Michigan, Ranking Member Upton.