

Opening Statement
Chairman Bobby L. Rush
Subcommittee on Energy
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on “Oversight of DOE During the COVID-19 Pandemic”
July 14, 2020

Good afternoon.

The recent decline in our nation’s economic activity has resulted in a multitude of hardships within our communities and economic sectors. Today, the Subcommittee on Energy convenes for a hearing to further examine the impacts of the novel coronavirus on a vital segment of the economy.

From the outset, the pandemic has presented the energy sector with numerous challenges ranging from staggering unemployment rates, supply chain disruptions, declining demand, and depleted investment.

At present, 1.3 million members of the energy sector workforce remain unemployed. A significant percentage of these jobs were once occupied by people of color and hardworking members of the clean energy industry, which previously enjoyed steady growth.

Taking this into account, the Subcommittee held a remote hearing in June to discuss the sector’s recent setbacks. Through this hearing we received expert testimony from witnesses who spoke to the pandemic’s effect on clean energy jobs as well as the industry’s function as an economic recovery tool.

In response to this hearing, I was proud to join my colleagues in including provisions to support workforce development, diversity, and clean energy infrastructure investment within the recent infrastructure bill.

This Committee, through its broad jurisdiction, has oversight of federal agency resources that are key to the confrontation of the public health crisis and economic challenges linked to the coronavirus.

The Department of Energy, and its vast enterprise, is chief among these resources. This is why I am pleased to welcome the Secretary of Energy, Dan Brouillette, who will testify before the Subcommittee today.

To date, the Department of Energy has leveraged its national laboratory system — which includes Chicago's close neighbor, Argonne National Lab — to harness its super computing capabilities to fight COVID-19.

Additionally, it has worked to support the public and private sectors in keeping the lights on.

However, the full deployment of DOE's resources is of great importance to our nation's economic recovery.

Existing program offices, like the Office of Economic Impact and Diversity and the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, have the ability to drive employment opportunities, enhance sector diversity, and secure energy savings — especially at a time when they are needed most.

Therefore, I look forward to today's discussion, as a first step in ensuring a productive partnership to preserve reliability and opportunity within the energy sector. With that, I yield to my friend and colleague, the gentleman from Michigan, Ranking Member Upton.