

Opening Statement of Republican Leader Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Energy
“Generating Equity: Improving Clean Energy Access and Affordability”
October 1, 2020

As Prepared for Delivery

Today’s hearing will examine an important topic concerning access and affordability of energy for low-income or otherwise disadvantaged households.

As a result of COVID-19 related shutdowns and economic hardships, energy cost burdens have become more common. Sadly, many Americans now know what it feels like to have limited resources to pay to keep the lights on, the air conditioning running, and the car fueled. Fortunately, the economy is rebounding and there is help available to these families.

Data from the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, which we will hear from this morning, indicates 26 million households face a “high energy burden.” This means six percent or more of these households’ spending goes toward energy—and this does *not* include fuel for necessary transportation, which further adds to the burden.

Department of Energy [data show](#) the states with the highest low-income energy burdens – 10 percent or higher – are in the Southeastern United States where the most electricity is used for heating and cooling. Low-income households in that region use approximately 36 percent more electricity than the national average for low-income households in other regions of the country.

Fortunately, Southeastern states also enjoy some of the lowest electricity rates in the nation. So, imagine the impact on low-income households in [Mississippi](#), [Alabama](#), [Georgia](#), or [South Carolina](#) if energy policies drove up the price of electricity so much that they had to pay the same rates as residents of [Connecticut](#), where prices are nearly twice as high.

Or consider other parts of the country – like my home state of Oregon. If radical environmentalist policies severely curtailed our state’s dominant hydroelectric production, what would that mean to low-income households if we doubled our electricity rates to California’s levels? What would it mean for our ability to provide energy assistance?

There are many state and federal programs aimed at relieving American families’ energy burdens. These include efficiency and weatherization programs at the Department of Energy and subsidy programs at the Department of Health and Human Services – programs which are authorized by this Committee.

Several witnesses this morning will talk about ways to improve coordination among federal programs and how we measure poverty to expand energy access and affordability.

My point here is that whatever the value of these programs, we cannot lose sight of the powerful impact federal, state, and local energy policies – including clean energy – have on the underlying affordability and reliability of energy. Renewable energy sources have a place, but they cannot come at the expense of families who are already struggling to make ends meet.

Policies that drive up energy prices or curtail access to energy sources conflict directly with efforts to confront poverty. These policies risk depriving people of a key component of community and household prosperity. Access to affordable, reliable energy is essential for jobs and economic opportunity, especially in low-income communities.

This is plainly evident in the expensive energy policies of California. Mandates to increase renewable energy and electrification are raising prices for power seven times faster than the rest of the nation, as we will [hear this morning](#), and driving out high-paying energy jobs – including thousands of jobs associated with zero-emissions nuclear energy. New policies seeking to end use of natural gas and gas-fueled vehicles will further drive up housing and transportation costs, which is especially harmful to the working poor.

Robert Bryce, who is testifying today for the [Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity](#), will provide some useful perspective we all should keep in mind as we consider various policies to “accelerate” to clean energy systems.

Throughout this Congress, Republicans have advocated for practical approaches to address climate risks and improve and protect the environment. We have advocated for removing regulatory barriers to promote innovation and foster the deployment of new, clean energy sources. Our view has been that the surest path to cleaner energy systems is to put the energy consumer front and center so that we do not undermine our nation’s ability to make and do things, nor deprive people their own opportunities for prosperity.

We know this can work because we have seen the benefits in cleaner air, world-leading reductions in carbon emissions, and—at least prior to COVID-19—an increasingly productive economy. We should not lose sight of that larger picture as we look at policies to help those most in need.