

**Committee on Energy and Commerce**  
**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery**  
**of**  
**Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.**

*Hearing on “A Smarter Investment: Pathways to a Clean Energy Future”*

**February 18, 2021**

Today the Energy Subcommittee begins its work for this Congress, renewing our efforts to chart a path to a clean energy future. Last Congress was particularly productive for the Subcommittee, culminating in enactment of the Energy Act of 2020. I commend Chairman Rush along with many others from both sides of the aisle for their work on the new law.

Last year, Chairmen Rush, Tonko and I released a draft of the CLEAN Future Act, comprehensive climate legislation to get us to a 100 percent clean economy by 2050. In the coming weeks, we plan to introduce an updated version of the CLEAN Future Act that will serve as the basis for comprehensive climate action this year.

The CLEAN Future Act touches on the whole energy economy, from the power sector to buildings to transportation – all aspects we will explore at today’s hearing. The bill includes a federal clean electricity standard, or CES, a policy that has long existed in many states. A national CES can play a key role in building a clean power sector, which is critical to reducing carbon emissions in other economic sectors. And, the CLEAN Future Act also sets forth policies to drastically reduce energy consumption in the building, transportation and industrial sectors, among others.

President Biden has made the climate crisis a centerpiece of his administration and has already taken bold action to address climate change. I stand ready to work with him to enact comprehensive climate legislation and hope my Republican colleagues will join us in that effort.

As we discuss the climate crisis, it’s important to also recognize the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Last Congress, the Subcommittee held a hearing on the impacts of the pandemic on the energy sector, including job loss, delayed projects, and the effect of pandemic restrictions on energy demand. Pandemic-related job losses have also resulted in millions of households being unable to pay their utility bills. That’s why the reconciliation instructions our Committee marked up last week included additional funding for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program. LIHEAP helps the growing number of qualifying families pay their utility bills and is especially crucial during a pandemic.

Finally, it’s critical we discuss the devastating toll this week’s severe winter weather is taking on our nation. Millions are facing power outages in dangerously cold conditions. These outages are further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Earlier this week, the energy market in Texas known as ERCOT was forced to take 34,000 megawatts of electricity generation

off its system. Since Sunday evening, over 25,000 megawatts of mostly fossil-fueled energy were offline. Of this number, most of these outages are at gas-fired power plants.

Those are the facts as stated by Texas' own grid regulator. Yet, some Republicans and conservative media outlets are peddling alternate realities. They are shamefully turning a crisis into an anti-renewables campaign, and they are conveniently leaving out the fact that the majority of the failures have come from fossil fuel infrastructure. Unfortunately, this misinformation campaign is nothing new.

The fact is the power outages in Texas and other states throughout the mid-west and south are not a failure of any single generation technology. Every technology has been affected, including nuclear and coal. What failed was a sector that didn't consider fully our changing climate and the extreme weather that comes with it. It was a failure to fully recognize that the 100-year storm of yesterday may now be the every 10-year storm of today.

As both the Department of Energy (DOE) and fossil generation companies reported yesterday, gas pipelines, wells and plants all froze because they weren't equipped to handle the cold weather.

Furthermore, the severely limited interconnection between ERCOT and the rest of the country probably didn't help matters. What's truly sad is that we saw these problems arise 10 years ago this month with another major storm that hit Texas and the southwest. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) even issued a report but nothing changed. Hopefully, this time it will.

The fact that Texas is an island separated from the rest of the nation's energy grid doesn't help because it's only more difficult for us to get power to them in a time of crisis. Hopefully, we won't ignore this last FERC report and we'll follow up on it. I also want to stress that this Committee will investigate the Texas crisis further and we'll see what other action we have to take based on that report as well as what we find out today.

Ultimately, this episode underscores the importance of prioritizing clean and resilient energy infrastructure, which is exactly what we aim to do in the CLEAN Future Act.

These major outages also show that the climate crisis doesn't differentiate between red states and blue states: the whole nation is being impacted by the climate crisis. It's time to recognize that and join together to enact the best comprehensive solutions for keeping Americans safe with affordable, reliable, and clean energy.