

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

Hearing on “Generating Equity: Deploying a Just and Clean Energy Future”

April 20, 2021

Thank you, Chairman Rush, for holding this important hearing on deploying a just and clean energy future. Chairman Rush has been a champion for ensuring inclusion of underserved communities and communities of color in the clean energy transition, including through his recently introduced bill, the Energy Equity Act of 2021.

Today we will discuss how we can improve clean energy access and equity, which is a critical part of our efforts to tackle the climate crisis. The equitable deployment of clean energy technologies is crucial for our energy transition. We must ensure that all communities have access to the environmental benefits and economic opportunities of clean energy.

The Committee has held several hearings on this critical topic. Last Congress, this Subcommittee held a hearing on energy burdens faced by low-income communities and communities of color, and how the pandemic exacerbated these burdens. And, last week, the Environment and Climate Change Subcommittee held a hearing on important legislation to address the needs of environmental justice communities. Through these hearings, we have heard about the urgent needs of these communities and we have explored different strategies to address existing and long-standing disparities.

The equitable deployment of clean energy will produce a lot of positive results. It will improve local air quality, help us meet climate goals, stabilize and lower energy prices, provide access to good jobs, and help stimulate local economies in both urban or rural areas.

For too long, underserved communities and communities of color have disproportionately faced the negative effects of fossil fuel generation and climate change. These communities are often the most impacted by the climate crisis and our country’s history of reliance on fossil fuels because they are oftentimes located in close proximity to power plants or urban heat islands. They also frequently endure housing conditions that lack proper weatherization. By gaining access to clean energy technology, such as through community solar subscriptions or energy efficiency upgrades, these households can see reduced energy burdens and health risks, as well as increased economic opportunity.

The energy industry is changing and this is good news for our efforts to tackle the climate crisis and to create good-paying jobs for American workers. According to the 2020 U.S. Energy and Employment Report solar and wind jobs paid higher wages than those in the fossil fuel sector. And, the clean energy sector employed roughly three times more workers than the fossil fuel sector in 2019.

Despite these promising trends, I believe the federal government needs to do more to speed up and incentivize the clean energy transition. And that is exactly what we accomplish

April 20, 2021

Page 2

with the CLEAN Future Act, a plan to combat the climate crisis and achieve net zero greenhouse gas pollution by no later than 2050. Our bill includes several provisions that support clean energy development and deployment, including in underserved areas. It also includes a robust set of provisions on workforce development and transition.

This is the kind of comprehensive approach that we must take. I outright reject claims that we must choose between addressing climate change and the communities that currently rely on fossil fuel jobs. That's a false choice because this transition is already happening. Market forces are already driving down coal revenue. Coal generation fell ten percent from 29 percent in 2017 to 19 percent in 2020. Clean energy is the future and it is time that we work together to ensure these communities don't get left behind.

Yesterday, the nation's largest mining union put out a document about the transition, saying "Change is coming, whether we seek it or not." Its president said: "We're on the side of job creation, of a future for our people." So are we.

Make no mistake – the rest of the world is already embarking on a major transition to clean technology. We simply cannot stand idly by as the world moves on without us and American workers and industries get left behind.

It is time we come together to ensure everyone – regardless of who they are or where they live – has access to cleaner, cheaper energy and the jobs that come with growth in the clean energy sector.