

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Energy, Climate, and Grid Security
Ranking Member Diana DeGette

Hearing on “Keeping the Lights On: Enhancing Reliability and Efficiency to Power American Homes”

September 13, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Duncan.

I appreciate you holding this hearing, I think it’s important for us to consider this issue today. Reliable electricity is one of the most important facets of our lives, and I think you’d be hard pressed to find anyone in this room who disagrees with that. I believe it is critical that the federal government work with stakeholders to ensure that Americans have access to the energy they need when they need it. When Americans flip a switch, they expect it to turn on, as they should, because it’s so critically important. And, as we face down the worsening climate crisis, reliability is more important than ever. This summer we saw record breaking heat grip large parts of the United States. If electricity reliability were impacted in a serious way, this summer would not just have been deadly, it would have been catastrophic. In fact, a study published earlier this summer found that, in a city like Phoenix, Arizona, a prolonged power outage during the summer could kill thousands and severely harm half of the city’s population. It’s clear, a reliable supply of electricity is paramount to our nation’s health and wellbeing.

I believe one way to help ensure we have reliable electricity is through energy efficiency. By increasing energy efficiency, we cut down on the energy we consume, allowing us to get more out of our current energy supply, in turn helping promote reliability. I would also note that not only do energy efficiency measures and standards stretch our energy supply, but they also save consumers money in the long run. In fact, the Congressionally mandated standards proposed by the Biden Administration would collectively save Americans \$570 billion over the next 30 years. But when I look at the bills that we’re discussing today, I don’t see bills that are focused on reliability. Instead, I see bills that would gut energy efficiency standards that are saving Americans money and cutting down on their energy use. I see bills that not only seek to uphold the status quo, but, in some cases, roll back progress we’ve made slashing emissions, cleaning our air, and saving consumers money.

H.R. 4167 would prohibit the Department of Energy from issuing a final rule for energy efficiency standards in distribution transformers for five years, in the name of addressing a supply chain issue. DOE has just proposed a rule. It has a process for incorporating feedback and will make changes to the final rule that are necessary to ensure reliability. I agree, the supply chain issue must be addressed, but I struggle with delaying a rule before the DOE has finished its process and without addressing the root cause of the issue.

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The DOE Appliance and Equipment Standards Reform and Consumer Protection Act would create duplicative, burdensome requirements for energy efficiency standards, as well as set a disastrous precedent of rolling back standards that are making a difference. This bill continues the disturbing trend against commonsense standards that save money and protect consumer's health and wellbeing. Finally, the GRID Act would give FERC veto power over any regulation it claims would impact reliability. This bill would strip federal agencies of their ability to do their jobs.

I fear that, while some may be well intentioned, these bills do not address reliability. Instead, if we truly want to address reliability issues, let's find solutions that address the root causes and let's start talking about one of the best ways to ensure reliability, transmission. We want to talk about reliability, but there is no discussion about how to get more transmission online expeditiously. Increased transmission means more generating projects can get connected to the grid. Increased transmission will mean we can ensure energy gets to where it's needed when it's needed, and in times of emergency, energy can come from elsewhere to ensure reliability. I know you're planning to hold a hearing on transmission, Mr. Chairman, so I look forward to that hearing being scheduled soon. I look forward to our conversation today, and I hope we can have a in depth conversation about finding meaningful solutions.

With that, I yield back.