

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.**

***Hearing on “Exposing President Biden’s Plan to Dismantle the Snake River Dams and the
Negative Impacts to the United States”***

January 30, 2024

Today the Subcommittee is holding a hearing on a strong agreement the Biden Administration negotiated to provide much-needed certainty to the Pacific Northwest and the Columbia River basin. Over the past 20 years, courts have consistently found that the current operation of the Columbia River System violates the Endangered Species Act. It was important for the Biden Administration to act so that the region’s power system was not put at risk, and to ensure we are meeting our treaty and trust responsibilities to the Columbia River Basin tribes.

The Biden Administration found a path forward with the tribes and the states of Washington and Oregon that allows for a more predictable clean energy future and makes much-needed investments in the steelhead and salmon that have nearly been driven to extinction in the region. This agreement provides for a decade-long stay of litigation and was the product of years of hard work from stakeholders across the region, including federal and state governments, tribal nations, and industries that rely on the river.

Unfortunately, this agreement has been clouded by misinformation, and we’re likely to hear more of that misinformation here today. Since Republicans have been unable to propose serious solutions to the complex issues facing the Columbia River Basin, they are now baselessly attacking the Biden Administration’s action in order to distract from their own inability to govern.

The Republican majority’s hyperbole around this hearing has been ridiculous. They claim that the Biden Administration has “a secret plan to dismantle the snake river dams.” Apparently, it’s so secret that the Administration’s detailed 56-page agreement doesn’t even mention it! Republicans also claim that the Administration’s goal is to “destroy lives” in Washington State, a claim so over the top that it would be laughable if it wasn’t so offensive.

So let’s get to the facts. Nothing in this agreement provides for the removal or breach of the dams. The agreement is very precise in noting that it does not “constitute a decision by the U.S. government to support legislation to authorize dam breaching.” Only Congress can authorize breach or removal of the dams – and the only member of Congress currently calling for that is Republican Representative Mike Simpson of Idaho.

The reality is that the status quo of the river is unsustainable. For two decades now, the United States government has consistently lost case after case in the courts involving the operations of the river system and its impacts on endangered fish in the ecosystem. Multiple court orders have required the Bonneville Power Administration, which operates the dams, to alter their operations so they are no longer producing hydropower when the region needs it most. If litigation had proceeded on any of these fronts, the Pacific Northwest would face unacceptable uncertainty on the status of dam operations that it relies on. This agreement provides certainty going forward.

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With that, I want to yield the remainder of my time to Dr. Schrier, who represents a district in Washington state directly impacted by the river system and this agreement.