

Committee on Energy and Commerce

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

Hearing on “Green Building Policies: Jeopardizing the American Dream of Homeownership”

May 22, 2024

Today we are once again seeing how extreme House Republicans have become when it comes to our nation’s energy policies. At every turn, they put polluters over people, including relentlessly attacking popular energy efficiency programs that save American families money on their energy bills and help us confront the worsening climate crisis.

Energy efficiency used to be a bipartisan issue. It wasn’t controversial because both Democrats and Republicans recognized that it was commonsense and an all-around win for American families. Unfortunately, that’s no longer the case. All Congress long, House Republicans have been looking to roll back energy efficiency standards. The Republicans’ extreme attack on energy efficiency programs continues today with a look at building codes.

Building codes are saving American households thousands of dollars on their energy bills. The Department of Housing and Urban Development found that a typical household would save \$15,000 from a house built to the current model code, compared to one built to the 2009 code. For low-income families using a Federal Housing Administration loan, savings pay back the up-front expense in one and a half years. And these codes ensure some base standards for energy conservation for renters, who cannot choose how their houses or apartments are built.

These standards are critical because buildings account for 40 percent of our total energy consumption. Building codes are a critical tool to not only save Americans money, but also dramatically reduce energy consumption and decrease dangerous climate pollution. Energy conservation codes are projected to save Americans \$182 billion and avoid 840 million metric tons of carbon pollution by 2040. These are real savings that we should all be proud of.

But, instead, we’re going to hear nothing but fearmongering and misinformation from Committee Republicans. They are throwing around exaggerated numbers of upfront costs and payback periods that are simply not true. These codes help households save money. It’s that simple.

Republicans also choose to ignore the fact that building codes are voluntary. There is NO federal mandate for states to adopt a certain code for households. The codes are set by third-party organizations, and then states and local entities choose whether or not to adopt the codes.

If Republicans were serious about energy costs and trying to help Americans save money, they would be investigating real scandals like Big Oil colluding with OPEC to increase prices at the pump. Committee Democrats opened an investigation into this collusion today. They would also express concern that the International Code Council bowed to the gas industry and violated its own policies in the recent code development process.

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But instead, Republicans are going after things like dishwashers, refrigerators, and now building codes, all to drive up energy bills on American families and protect their friends in the oil and gas industry.

Fortunately, despite the Majority's best efforts, the Biden Administration is making real progress to reduce energy costs for middle class Americans. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act both provided funding to states and local entities to help adopt these voluntary codes. And, the Administration recently finalized a Bush-era provision to phase-out fossil fuel-generated energy consumption in new and remodeled federal buildings.

I am eager to hear how building and energy conservation codes save money for Americans, as well as the other benefits they can provide, such as improving indoor air quality and reducing emissions. We should be figuring out how to further assist states and local entities that want to adopt these codes, instead of attacking the codes and falsely claiming that they are somehow mandatory when they are not.

With that, I yield back the balance of my time.