

Chairman Brett Guthrie
Opening Statement—Subcommittee on Energy
“Winter Storm Fern Lessons: Supplying Reliable Power to Meet Peak Demand”
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As prepared for delivery

Massive winter storms put our vital energy and power delivery systems to the test this year.

Today’s focus on winter storm Fern helps direct attention to what really matters for designing our electric system—making sure energy systems provide the power Americans need, when they need it.

Fern and other recent major storms like Elliott in 2022 and Uri in 2021 present consistent lessons to discuss this morning.

First, reliable generation resources matter.

When power demand spikes during major winter storms, 70 percent to 90 percent of additional electricity needed is supplied by dispatchable fossil generation—natural gas, coal, and even oil.

Nuclear consistently provides baseload power, and these dispatchable resources step into the breach.

Wind power may supply additional energy in some regions, but, despite its enormous capacity, it cannot be relied upon during these storms. Solar energy can be relied upon even less so.

Second, preparation and planning matters.

Vast, multi-day deep freezes challenge fuel and grid systems across large regions. This requires planning and coordination to make sure power will be available as demand spikes.

Winter storm Elliott caused the highest single day electricity demand on record during the winter. It also caused 90 gigawatts of cold-weather related generation outages—more than other recent storms.

Operators underestimated the demand and extent of the freeze, which reduced gas supplies and gas generation.

The storm was so large, Southeastern states could not import sufficient power from other regions, which were short excess power.

This caused rolling blackouts, including in Kentucky, on Christmas Eve. Authorities said a longer freeze would have been catastrophic for New York City gas supplies.

How past lessons informed preparation for last month's storm will be useful to examine today.

The Trump Administration leaned in effectively on coordination, gas generators withstood winter impacts better than in past storms, and there was more energy to dispatch as demand spiked.

Third, what we do in the future matters.

Expanding generation and a grid to meet massive new energy demand requires a focus on policies that ensure reliable, affordable power delivery.

Storms like Fern show us the generation mix that we can depend upon when it matters the most.