

Chairman Robert Latta
Opening Statement—Subcommittee on Energy

“Winter Storm Fern Lessons: Supplying Reliable Power to Meet Peak Demand”

March 17, 2026

As prepared for delivery

Good morning and welcome to today’s hearing to examine the performance of our electric grid through the duration of Winter Storm Fern.

Starting on January 23rd, a significant winter storm brought widespread snow, sleet, and freezing rain from New England to the Rockies and down to the Gulf of America.

This storm was followed by an Arctic Front that kept stubbornly low temperatures across the country and additional snowstorms.

As expected, American families bundled up, staying indoors to avoid the inclement weather and dangerous road conditions.

When they were at home, they relied on our nation’s complex energy system to keep the lights on, their homes warmed, and fridges stocked.

Just like any other day, families expected their lights to come on at the flip of a switch.

While seemingly routine, an exhaustive amount of preparation, coordination, and real-time decision making occurred behind the scenes to make sure American communities had power.

While some outages occurred, the grid held up because of the important work of some the witnesses we have before us.

The Southwest Electric Power Company, or SWEPCO (*Swep-Co*), is an electric utility across Arkansas, Texas, and Louisiana.

The Northeast Gas Association represents natural gas utilities across 11 northeastern states.

Grid Strategies develops public policies that support a clean energy transition.

And the North American Electric Reliability Corporation, or NERC, is the regulatory authority that ensures reliability and security of our nation’s bulk power system.

Together, these witnesses will provide critical insights into how the nation's electric grid remained resilient through the duration of this significant weather event.

While I'm looking forward to today's opportunity to learn about the grid's performance through the storm, one thing remains clear – baseload and dispatchable resources saved the day.

Generation from coal, natural gas, and fuel oil skyrocketed while intermittent resource generation plummeted.

Nuclear, as always, remained steady and reliable.

Without access to these affordable and reliable supplies of baseload generation, the setting of this hearing would look much different.

Power outages that occur in freezing temperatures cause billions in economic damage and, even more importantly, tragic deaths in our vulnerable communities.

Our New England states illustrate an interesting example.

Through the storm, the fuel mix in New England was carried by natural gas, fuel oil, and nuclear power.

In spite of generous subsidies and favorable public policy choices, intermittent resources were nowhere to be found when we needed power the most.

Because limited gas pipeline capacity into the New England region restricts supply and raises prices, power plants had to opt for more expensive and less efficient fuel oil.

It's important to recognize that fuel oil plants were the predominant source of generation 70 years ago.

Importantly, outages across the country were limited – but the success of the grid through Winter Storm Fern should serve as a warning.

That brings us to the present day – how should policy makers and regulators consider the operation of our future bulk power system.

We stand on the precipice of tremendous growth in our nation's electricity demand.

This committee has held several hearings and passed legislation to shore up the reliability crisis caused by the Biden administration and to power next generation industries.

Now, we are considering the implications of a generation resource mix that can appropriately meet the needs of households at all times of the year while simultaneously ensuring America leads in the future economy.

The answer is clear – our nation needs dispatchable energy and a lot more of it.

Given the military activity taking place in Iran and implications of energy markets through the Strait of Hormuz, now more than ever we need to utilize the bountiful resources we have here at home.

The lessons of Winter Storm Fern should illustrate that common sense must rule the day.

American energy dominance and independence must be achieved so we can keep our communities safe at home.

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