

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

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

March 17, 2026

Today’s hearing addresses an important topic, but given that this Committee has jurisdiction over the reliability and affordability of all energy, not just electricity, we should really be addressing skyrocketing oil prices – all the result of Trump deciding to wage an irresponsible war in Iran. The war is throwing the region and gas prices into chaos.

Two weeks ago, President Trump threw the Middle East into chaos with his irresponsible war, and in the weeks since, it has become clear: no one in the Trump Administration had a plan for what to do about oil prices let alone any plans on how to end a war that should never have happened. It has been an absolute mess. Oil prices have been extraordinarily volatile, while gasoline prices have increased by nearly 75 cents per gallon since the start of the year. Some analysts think that oil could reach over \$200 per barrel – and it’s clear that the Trump Administration has no idea how to fix it.

In fact, Trump does not actually consider this a problem. Just last week he said, “when oil prices go up, we make a lot of money.”

I don’t know about you, but when oil prices go up, my constituents feel it in their wallets. American families feel it as they sit around their kitchen table, trying to figure out how they’re going to make ends meet. It is, once again, crystal clear that the President only cares about making Big Oil CEOs a buck. That’s who he was talking about when he said, “we make a lot of money.” And once again American families suffer – they are left paying the bill.

Trump and Congressional Republicans are not only driving up oil prices – their policies are also driving up monthly power bills. Which gets us to the topic of today’s hearing. Just under two months ago, much of the southern and eastern parts of the country was under a blanket of snow. Temperatures plummeted, winds whipped, and many of us feared the worst. However, the bulk power system endured.

That’s not to say there weren’t localized issues. Local distribution systems suffered, with freezing rain and wind taking down power lines and causing blackouts. Utility crews worked around the clock to restore power, and all of us are deeply thankful for their hard work. But at the end of the day, unlike in Texas during Winter Storm Uri or the southeast during Winter Storm Elliott, there was enough supply of electricity to meet demand.

Grid reliability is a team sport. Every resource – including wind, solar, and storage – has a role to play. These resources were especially vital during Winter Storm Fern, as renewables in

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general exceeded expectations. They were able to take on more of a role than the grid operators required.

But that was not the case for every resource. The weather knocked roughly 20 gigawatts of largely fossil fuel resources offline in the mid-Atlantic alone due in part to “freeze offs” at gas wellheads.

Unfortunately, transmission constraints harmed the grid during the Winter Storm and helped bring us close to the brink. Within PJM, power in Chicago was bottled up and couldn’t reach the East Coast to help lower prices. In the middle of the country, Southwest Power Pool had to curtail nearly 10 gigawatts of wind energy at one point because it didn’t have the transmission capacity to take that power to where it was needed most.

A 2024 study by the North American Electric Reliability Corporation found that our country needs *over 35 gigawatts* of new interregional transmission for its reliability needs alone – and that’s *before* taking into account the tremendous growth in data centers fueling artificial intelligence applications that we’ve seen following that study. If Republicans were serious about wanting to make our grid more resilient to extreme weather, we would be talking about how to build more large, interregional power lines.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge a central irony of what some of my colleagues are advocating for today. We all agree that severe weather events stress the grid unlike anything else. But the increase in severe weather events is fueled by the same polluting coal power plants that many Republicans want to be the solution to severe weather events.

Forcing every coal plant in this country to stay online will further exacerbate climate change in the coming decades. We must invest in real, durable reliability for the power grid.

Thank you and I yield back the balance of my time.