

**Committee on Energy and Commerce**  
**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery**  
**of**  
**Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change Chairman Paul D. Tonko**  
  
*Hearing on “Back in Action: Restoring Federal Climate Leadership”*

**February 9, 2021**

We began the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress with a hearing called “Back in Action: Restoring Federal Climate Leadership.”

It allowed us to understand the latest climate science, the opportunities to grow America’s economy by deploying clean energy technologies and better, safer, more resilient infrastructure, and the consequences that will befall future generations of Americans should we fail to act swiftly and with boldness.

We have already begun to see those future generations cast unfavorable judgement on current elected leaders for doing so little, so slowly, at a time when the science—and the stakes for them personally—could not be more clear.

This is why, in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Committee held a series of hearings focused on achieving economy-wide, net-zero emissions no later than 2050.

It is why we brought in stakeholders from far and wide, and used their insights to write and release the CLEAN Future Act, a discussion draft for national climate legislation spanning our economy.

We saw the need for urgent and ambitious Federal policies supporting a wide range of technologies that could help us achieve necessary decarbonization targets in an efficient and cost-effective way.

This is also why many of us are excited that, in its first days, the Biden Administration has started to build a foundation for the kind of bold climate action America needs now. In today’s hearing we can expect to learn more about the underlying strategies in that first set of Executive Orders, as well as gaps Congress will need fill to complement executive action. Achieving net-zero emissions will mean transforming our economy. We know this will not be an easy task.

President Biden knows this too and is calling for a whole-of-government approach—directing every agency to use existing authorities and budgets to the fullest to not only reduce climate pollution, but also spark a new age of innovation, of environmental justice, of support for workers and their families and communities through America’s energy transition, to grow well-paying jobs, and always to put science at the heart of our public policy.

The Executive Orders signed by President Biden last month established—for the first time—a

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White House Office of Domestic Climate Policy, led by the National Climate Advisor, a National Climate Task Force, and a Special Presidential Envoy for Climate. These will be critical to coordinate across agencies in both domestic and foreign policy.

These are wise and welcomed steps, but on their own they are not enough. Congress cannot turn away from this responsibility any longer. We must act.

At its core, President Biden's Build Back Better agenda is about making Federal investments and implementing pollution-reducing standards to drive America's economic recovery and put millions of Americans to work modernizing our infrastructure and making us a healthier, more competitive, and more just nation.

This approach will create good jobs building America's next generation infrastructure, produce affordable clean energy, protect public health through cleaner air and water, and breathe new life into American manufacturing.

Importantly, this agenda recognizes that America can—and should—manufacture products with the lowest emissions in the world. If we don't, America's competitors will make those same products with much weaker environmental and labor standards.

Our approach must keep America's energy-intensive industries operating here in the U.S., employing American workers, and moving toward a decarbonized future. And Congress can help make that happen.

Similarly, the Build Back Better agenda drives these investments beyond the small confines of existing centers of wealth and power to reach all neighborhoods, so that low-income Americans, communities of color, and indigenous communities not only share in America's prosperous future, but bring it to life. But we can't stop there.

We need rural, deindustrialized, and communities that have historically relied on fossil fuels to know they have a big role to play in building America's future.

While sharing the investments and the benefits of America's climate transformation will be part of the solution, people must have a seat at the table, to be heard and to participate in the decisions to determine the future economic development strategies for their own communities. I look forward to our witnesses' perspectives on the Biden Administration's climate Executive Orders and the role for Congress moving forward.

I am certain this will be just the first of many conversations this year focused on how to get the entire Federal government tackling climate change with the urgency and scale necessary. With that, I yield back.