

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

Hearing on The Republican Assault on Americans' Right to Reliable, Clean, and Affordable Energy

November 14, 2023

Today, we are once again discussing the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) recently proposed carbon pollution standards for fossil fuel power plants. At the first hearing on this topic in June, I made it clear that this long overdue proposal is critical to protecting the health of our communities from dangerous air pollution, fighting the worsening climate crisis, and delivering clean, affordable, and reliable energy to American families. The EPA's proposal is in line with the statutory requirements of the Clean Air Act and builds on the historic climate investments Democrats delivered last year with the Inflation Reduction Act.

This EPA action is necessary. The past 12 months have been the hottest ever recorded. And the findings from the Fifth National Climate Assessment, which were released today, underscore the need for urgent action to combat the threat of climate change. This action is needed to protect our communities from the devastating impacts of the climate crisis while also growing our economy as we fight to lead the way in the clean energy transition.

The power sector is the second-largest source of climate pollution in the United States, yet power plants are currently allowed to emit unlimited carbon pollution into the atmosphere. This poses extreme risks to public health and the environment, especially for already overburdened communities.

Congress explicitly gave EPA the authority to protect Americans from this harmful pollution, and it is meeting that obligation with this action. The EPA's proposal will finally set necessary emission limits and guidelines for carbon pollution from new and existing fossil fuel powerplants. The rule would avoid up to 617 million metric tons of carbon dioxide through 2042 – roughly equivalent to the annual emissions of half of the cars on our nation's roadways. And communities are projected to see up to \$85 billion in net climate and health-related benefits.

Unfortunately, Committee Republicans choose to ignore these significant benefits – they simply do not fit into their polluters over people agenda. They have made it clear they will oppose any attempt by the EPA to control dangerous pollution from power plants and will be pushing old and tired claims that are simply not true.

When it comes to reliability, the last few years have shown us that widespread overreliance on fossil fuels has left the power grid vulnerable – not commonsense EPA rules. In reality, extreme weather events driven by the climate crisis, coupled with unreliable fossil fuel

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infrastructure, have left communities in the dark. Doubling down on unchecked fossil fueled power plants will only make the situation worse.

Cleaning up existing power sources – as proposed by EPA’s rule – and deploying clean energy solutions will help boost flexibility and resiliency of the electricity system. We don’t have to choose between ensuring reliability and cutting pollution. We can and must do both. And EPA’s proposal gives states broad flexibility to make the best choices for their unique circumstances to comply with the standards.

It is also important to recognize that EPA’s proposal doesn’t exist in a vacuum. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act included critical investments to upgrade our nation’s power infrastructure, strengthen the grid, and cut power sector pollution with clean energy tax credits. The truth is, the market, bolstered by these key federal investments, is already driving changes in the power sector that states and utilities must plan for. EPA’s proposal merely builds on this existing momentum.

And some states are doing their part as well. I am pleased Maryland’s Secretary of the Environment, Serena McIlwain (Mac-ill-wayne), is here to explain how states, like Maryland are, cutting climate pollution from the power sector while ensuring reliability and affordability for communities.

And speaking of Maryland, this is our first hearing since Representative Sarbanes announced that he will be retiring at the end of this Congress. He’s been a long-time friend of mine and a long-time champion for the people of Maryland on this Committee.

It’s fitting that we are going to be hearing a lot about Maryland today because for 17 years in Congress, John has been fighting to protect the environment and to clean up the Chesapeake Bay. He has also fought for more-affordable, higher-quality health care not only for the people of Maryland but for all Americans. John was also our Democratic leader on the “For the People Act” to bring more accountability and transparency to government. John’s voice will be missed here on the Committee, but fortunately we have another year before he leaves us.

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