

Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
Legislative Hearing
1334 Longworth House Office Building
December 12, 2023
10:30 AM

H.R. 5482 (Rep. Hageman), *“Energy Poverty Prevention and Accountability Act of 2023”*;

H.R. 6474 (Rep. Steel), To amend the Energy Policy Act of 2005 to expedite geothermal exploration and development in previously studied or developed areas; and

H.R. 6481 (Rep. Hageman), To amend the Mineral Leasing Act to require the Secretary of the Interior to reimburse the fee for an expression of interest if the expression of interest becomes inactive, and for other purposes.

Questions from Rep. Dingell for Dr. J. Mijin Cha, Assistant Professor, University of California, Santa Cruz

1. Dr. Cha, does increasing fossil fuel production lead to lower energy costs?

Not necessarily. Without re--instating the ban on oil exports and expanding it to include banning gas exports, the fossil fuels produced domestically are being exported and sold in other countries. So while oil and gas production in the U.S. is at record levels, this increase in production is not leading to more domestic supply. As a result, energy costs are not lowered even though production levels are at record levels. Without the export ban, increasing fossil fuel production will not materially decrease energy costs.

2. Dr. Cha, can you expand on some of the root causes of energy insecurity?

The root causes of energy insecurity are general economic insecurity, poor housing stock, lack of access to capital, and homeowner status. General economic insecurity causes families to not have enough income or wealth to pay basic utility bills. Low-income households and households of color are more likely to live in housing in need of weatherization and energy-efficiency upgrades, but lack the capital to undertake these improvements. Inefficient and poorly weatherized housing creates poor health conditions and also requires more electricity and heating than necessary. These conditions result in excessively high utility bills even when rate pricing is lower. Moreover, weatherization and energy efficiency incentives are generally targeted at homeowners so renters, which low-income families are more likely to be, cannot take advantage of those programs.

The climate crisis is also a driver of energy insecurity as more extreme weather events disrupt power supplies and systems. These disruptions are often worse in low-income communities and communities of color leading to more energy insecurity among these populations.

3. Dr. Cha, do you believe HR 5482 “Energy Poverty Prevention and Accountability Act of 2023” addresses those issues?

No, HR 5482 does not address any of these issues. To the extent that HR 5482 protects the fossil fuel industry by providing skewed analysis of the benefits of expansions of fossil fuel activity, while ignoring the many costs and dangers, it will exacerbate the climate crisis further increasing energy insecurity.

4. Dr. Cha, can you elaborate about the importance of LIHEAP and whether current funding levels are enough to meet American families’ needs?

LIHEAP provides vital support at a time when many more families are struggling to pay their energy bills. LIHEAP provides assistance to over 6 million low-income families. Currently funding levels are far below what is needed to support American families. LIHEAP as currently funded can serve only less than a third of eligible households. LIHEAP funding would need to be tripled, at the minimum, to provide assistance to all the families in need. The Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), which helps low-income households weatherize their homes, is also a crucial lifeline that would structurally reduce energy costs by reducing energy usage. WAP is also severely underfunded.