



CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

Fueling the Golden Age: Future Resource Needs and Small Business Opportunity

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Testimony by

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Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify about America's future resource needs and the opportunities that a new era of American building can create for small businesses.

Our nation has vast energy resources. What we lack is the freedom to turn those resources into affordable, reliable power, and small businesses pay the price when we fail to build. Affordable, reliable energy is the foundation of American prosperity. Families need electricity they can afford; small businesses need dependable power to expand, hire, and compete; and communities need reliable energy infrastructure that supports investment and growth. Nationally, the United States needs abundant domestic energy to remain the world's leading economy, military power, and technological innovator.¹

This longstanding imperative is becoming more urgent, with increasing implications for small businesses. After many years of slow growth in electricity demand, America is entering a period in which the grid is increasingly called on to serve larger customers with more concentrated loads. Emerging technology is a powerful and near-term example. Its growth is a visible test of whether U.S. energy policy can deliver the affordable, reliable, and abundant energy needed for small businesses, families, and communities to prosper.²

The United States has the resources and capabilities to meet that test. The country should expand reliable domestic power, remove unnecessary barriers to building critical projects, and align significant new infrastructure costs with the parties that create them. Those principles can allow new demand growth to strengthen the electric system while protecting small businesses and family ratepayers.³

America possesses abundant energy, technology, capital, and entrepreneurial capacity. The central constraint is our ability to turn those strengths into power plants, pipelines, factories, transmission lines, and other infrastructure quickly enough to meet growing demand.

¹ Ellis, Mahmood & Salvador, [Powering America's Future with Affordable, Reliable Electricity](#) 1 (2026).

² *Id.* at 1–2.

³ *Id.* at 2.

The policy response can be summarized in three words: keep, build, and protect. Keep the reliable power America already has. Build the new energy and infrastructure growth requires. Protect Main Street from paying costs it did not create.

Main Street Has the Most at Stake

Small businesses have a direct stake in getting energy policy right because energy is embedded in almost everything they do. It heats and cools buildings, powers machinery and refrigeration, fuels trucks and equipment, runs computers and communications, and keeps the lights on for customers.

The National Federation of Independent Business's 2024 *Small Business Problems & Priorities* survey illustrates the stakes. Among 75 problems assessed, small-business owners ranked the cost of natural gas, propane, gasoline, diesel, and fuel oil sixth overall, with nearly one-quarter calling the problem critical. Electricity rates ranked tenth, with 16% calling them critical.⁴ NFIB's first nationwide small-business energy survey, released this year, provides further evidence. Electricity costs affect 92% of respondents. Roughly four in five small-business owners said energy costs have at least a moderate effect on their business. Just 8% reported that their energy costs had not increased during the previous three years. When costs rise, 58% reported absorbing them through lower profits and 52% raised prices. Two-thirds of businesses also experienced a power outage during the prior year.⁵

Small businesses generally have fewer ways to escape those costs than large corporations. They are less able to negotiate specialized utility arrangements, build their own generation, relocate a planned facility, or hedge energy costs across a large portfolio. A higher energy bill therefore comes out of profits, payroll, prices, borrowing capacity, or future investment.

Reliability has similar consequences for a small business' bottom line. A blackout can mean spoiled inventory, an interrupted production run, idle employees, damaged equipment, missed customers, or lost revenue.

⁴ National Federation of Independent Business, [2024 Small Business Problems & Priorities](#) 7, 9 (11th ed. 2024).

⁵ NFIB Research Center, [Small Business Energy Survey](#) (2026).

Small businesses are therefore on both sides of the energy equation. They are especially exposed when energy becomes more expensive or less reliable, and they are among the manufacturers, contractors, suppliers, and service firms that stand to gain when America expands its energy infrastructure.

Rising Demand Is an Opportunity

Rising electricity demand, driven by a variety of forces, requires America to expand its capacity to provide affordable, reliable electricity. Advanced manufacturing, reshoring, increasing consumer electrification, and emerging technologies are all adding demand after a long period of relatively flat electricity consumption. Utilities' 2025 forecasts project 166 gigawatts of national peak-load growth by 2030, more than six times the 24 gigawatts projected in the comparable 2022 forecast.⁶ Data centers are a large and noticeable part of that trend: the Department of Energy has found that major projections of incremental U.S. data center electricity demand by 2030 range from roughly 35 to 68 gigawatts of average load.⁷

That growth reflects small business expansion, new factories, added computing capacity, and reshoring and revived industrial production. The challenge for policymakers is to ensure that electricity supply keeps pace. America should add dependable generation at the speed and scale that growth requires while preserving affordable, reliable service for the small businesses already connected to the grid.

How Policy Made Affordable, Reliable Power Harder to Deliver

The increasingly fragile condition of parts of the U.S. electric system reflects several reinforcing policy choices. Weather-dependent resources received significant policy support while dependable plants retired; remaining thermal generators were increasingly expected to provide backup service even as their utilization fell; and permitting and regulatory barriers slowed the addition of replacement infrastructure.

⁶ John D. Wilson, Sophie Meyer, Zach Zimmerman & Rob Gramlich, [Power Demand Forecasts Revised Up for Third Year Running, Led by Data Centers](#) 3 (Grid Strategies, Nov. 2025).

⁷ U.S. Department of Energy, [Resource Adequacy Report: Evaluating the Reliability and Security of the United States Electric Grid](#) 16 (July 2025, updated Oct. 27, 2025); see also Ellis, Mahmood & Salvador, *supra* note 1, at 3–7.

Reliability Has Economic Value

Policymakers have often focused on the apparent cost of individual generating resources without fully accounting for the system-wide costs, including the cost of keeping the electric system reliable. PJM Interconnection's capacity ratings illustrate the underlying physical difference among resources. For the 2028–2029 Base Residual Auction, PJM credits nuclear generation at 96% of nameplate capacity for reliability purposes, coal at 85%, and combined-cycle natural gas at 78%. Onshore wind receives 34%, while fixed-tilt and tracking solar receive 7% and 10%, respectively.⁸

Those reliability differences have real cost consequences. Always On Energy Research modeled generation and system costs in Indiana and estimated existing combined-cycle natural gas generation at \$29.14 per megawatt-hour and existing coal at \$55.22. New combined-cycle natural gas ranged from roughly \$53 to \$78. Under the study's assumptions, wind increased from \$67.10 to \$129 per megawatt-hour after backup and other system costs were included, while solar increased from \$76.79 to \$159.24.⁹

Policies that require utilities to add intermittent generation still leave the system responsible for maintaining enough dependable capacity to serve customers during periods of low wind or solar production. Ratepayers can therefore end up paying for both portfolios: the additional intermittent resources and the firm fleet needed to preserve reliability. Lower utilization can also weaken the economics of dependable plants that the grid still needs. Families and businesses ultimately pay the full system cost of serving them every hour.

⁸ PJM Interconnection, [ELCC Class Ratings for the 2028/2029 Base Residual Auction](#) (Feb. 25, 2026). Midcontinent Independent System Operator, [Planning Year 2026–2027 Loss of Load Expectation Study Final Report](#) (2025). Indiana, mentioned in the subsequent paragraph, is served by both PJM and MISO. MISO's Planning Year 2026–2027 Loss of Load Expectation study found seasonal wind Effective Load Carrying Capability values of 18.2% in summer, 23.0% in fall, 30.9% in winter, and 19.3% in spring. MISO uses those seasonal wind ELCC values in determining the accredited capacity of in-service wind resources. The same study calculated solar ELCC values of 37.8% in summer, 18.2% in fall, 18.3% in winter, and 28.6% in spring; however, MISO does not currently use solar ELCC to accredit individual solar resources. Solar ELCC is instead used in calculating the system's resource adequacy requirements.

⁹ Isaac Orr & Mitch Rolling, [The Levelized Cost of Electricity in Indiana](#) (Always On Energy Research, Apr. 2026).

Existing Reliable Plants Can Remain Economical

Real-world operating data also show that many existing dependable plants remain competitive, even coal-fired power plants, which many assume are generally not cost-effective. Isaac Orr and Mitch Rolling examined 82 coal plants using Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Form 1 data. The plants averaged \$45.57 per megawatt-hour in operating and capital costs, and 77% operated below \$60. Within the same analysis of existing energy resources, nuclear energy averaged \$29.41 per MWh, combined-cycle natural gas \$41.55, wind \$59.78, and solar \$102.40.¹⁰

Those existing coal plants also come with assets that have already been built: fuel delivery systems, transmission connections, trained workforces, established industrial sites, and known roles in regional reliability. Retirement decisions should consider the value of those assets along with the cost and reliability of replacement power. As my AFPI colleagues have written, new reliable generation takes time to permit and build, so “the cheapest megawatt” will often be the one we already have.¹¹

State Policy Choices Matter to Electricity Prices

Electricity prices can differ sharply across the states, and state governments exercise substantial authority over the generation portfolios, utility regulation, siting rules, and mandates that shape those prices.

Always On Energy Research and the Institute for Energy Research found that 86% of continental states with electricity prices above the national average were states the study classified as “reliably blue,” while eight of the ten lowest-price states were classified as “reliably red.”¹² The value of that comparison is the different policy regimes behind the price differential, not partisan identifiers. The study associates higher electricity costs with renewable and carbon-free

¹⁰ Isaac Orr & Mitch Rolling, “[Debunking the Myth of Expensive Coal Plants](#),” *Energy Bad Boys* (June 27, 2026). The same analysis reports average costs of \$41.55/MWh for combined-cycle natural gas, \$45.57/MWh for existing coal, \$59.78/MWh for wind, and \$102.40/MWh for solar. The authors limited the analysis to plants with available FERC Form 1 data and excluded plants operating below a 15% capacity factor.

¹¹ Hayes, Vasquez & Antonini, [Ten Actions Congress Could Take to Lower Energy Prices](#) 3 (2026).

¹² Alexander Stevens et al., [Blue States, High Rates](#) 1–3 (Always On Energy Research & Institute for Energy Research, Dec. 2025). This conclusion is also consistent with research reviewed in Ellis, Mahmood & Salvador, *supra* note 1, at 4–5, 16, finding that state policy differences materially affect electricity rates and that current state-level evidence does not show data center concentration alone determining which states have the highest prices.

mandates, net-metering policies, restrictions on natural gas infrastructure, premature retirements of dispatchable generation, and other state-level energy policies.¹³

For small businesses, those policy choices translate into operating costs through higher electricity bills and, where reliability suffers, the costs of outages and interrupted service.

Permitting Delay Taxes Businesses That Want to Build

The permitting system also raises the cost of replacing and expanding energy infrastructure. Delays increase financing expenses and create uncertainty while capital, equipment, and workers wait for approvals. The National Association of Manufacturers and Foundation for American Innovation estimate that permitting delays cost manufacturers at least \$7.9 billion each year. Their survey found that 80% of manufacturers believe permitting complexity harms investment, while 66% said they would increase U.S. investment if permitting moved faster.¹⁴

The burden reaches small firms directly. A U.S. Chamber of Commerce small-business survey found that 51% said licensing, certification, and permit requirements make it harder to grow.¹⁵ That permitting burden sits within a broader regulatory burden that falls especially heavily on small manufacturers. The Small Business Administration's Office of Advocacy cites an estimate of \$50,100 in annual federal regulatory costs per employee for manufacturers with fewer than 50 employees.¹⁶

These costs affect whether a manufacturer expands, whether a contractor receives a project, whether aging equipment gets replaced, and whether new energy infrastructure reaches the businesses that need it. Permitting reform is therefore both an energy policy and a priority for small business growth.

¹³ Stevens et al., *supra* note 12.

¹⁴ National Association of Manufacturers & Foundation for American Innovation, [America on Hold: How Permitting Delays Stall Manufacturing Progress](#) (2026).

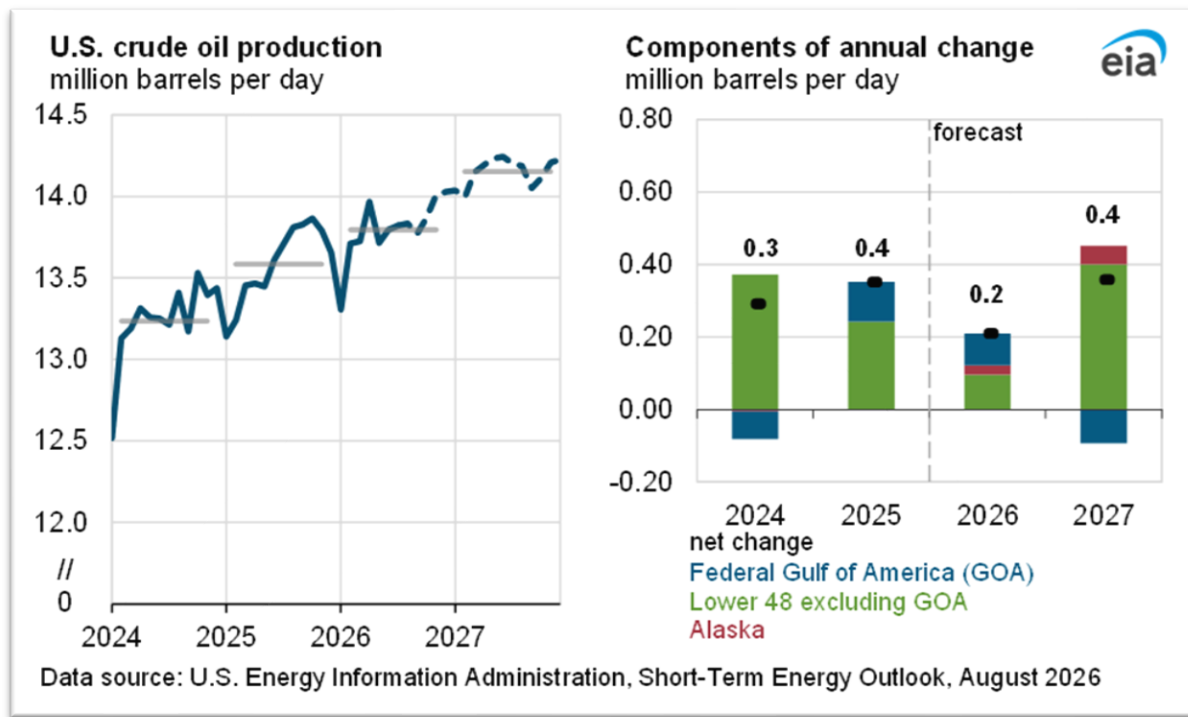
¹⁵ MetLife & U.S. Chamber of Commerce, [Small Business Index](#), Q4 2024.

¹⁶ U.S. Small Business Administration, Office of Advocacy, [Frequently Asked Questions About Small Business](#) 4 (Feb. 2026), citing National Association of Manufacturers.

America Is Charting a New Course

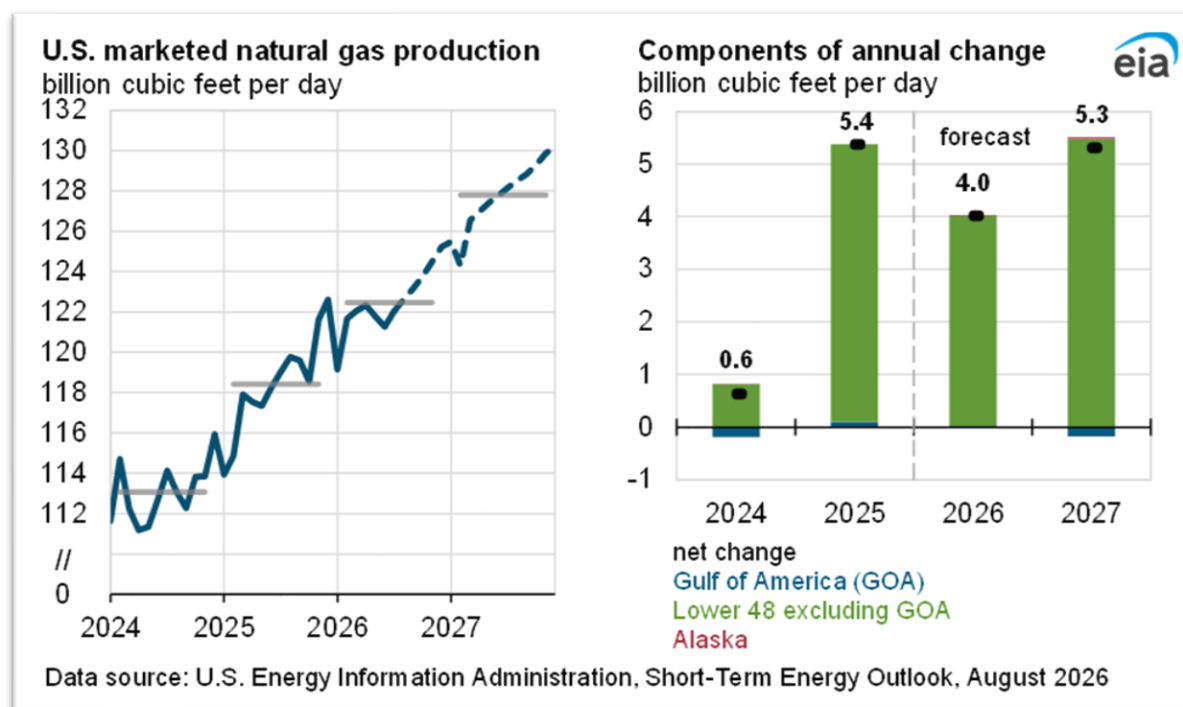
Recent developments show a meaningful change in direction. The Energy Information Administration forecasts marketed natural-gas production to average a record 122.5 billion cubic feet per day in 2026, above the previous record set in 2025. EIA projects U.S. crude-oil production at 13.8 million barrels per day this year and 14.2 million barrels per day in 2027.¹⁷

FIGURE 1 — U.S. Crude Oil Production, 2024–2027



¹⁷ U.S. Energy Information Administration, [Short-Term Energy Outlook](#) (Aug. 2026).

FIGURE 2 — U.S. Marketed Natural Gas Production



Higher production is encouraging, but converting that abundance into affordable electricity also requires power plants, pipelines, and transmission infrastructure. Federal policy has begun addressing some of those constraints. EPA finalized repeal of the 2024 amendments to the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards while retaining the underlying 2012 standards; EPA estimates the action will save approximately \$670 million from 2028 through 2037.¹⁸ EPA has also proposed repealing the previous administration’s greenhouse-gas standards for fossil-fueled power plants, often called the Clean Power Plan 2.0. I submitted comments on behalf of AFPI supporting that proposal because the prior rule depended heavily on 90% carbon-capture requirements for long-term coal generation and new baseload natural-gas plants that had not been demonstrated commercially at the required scale.¹⁹

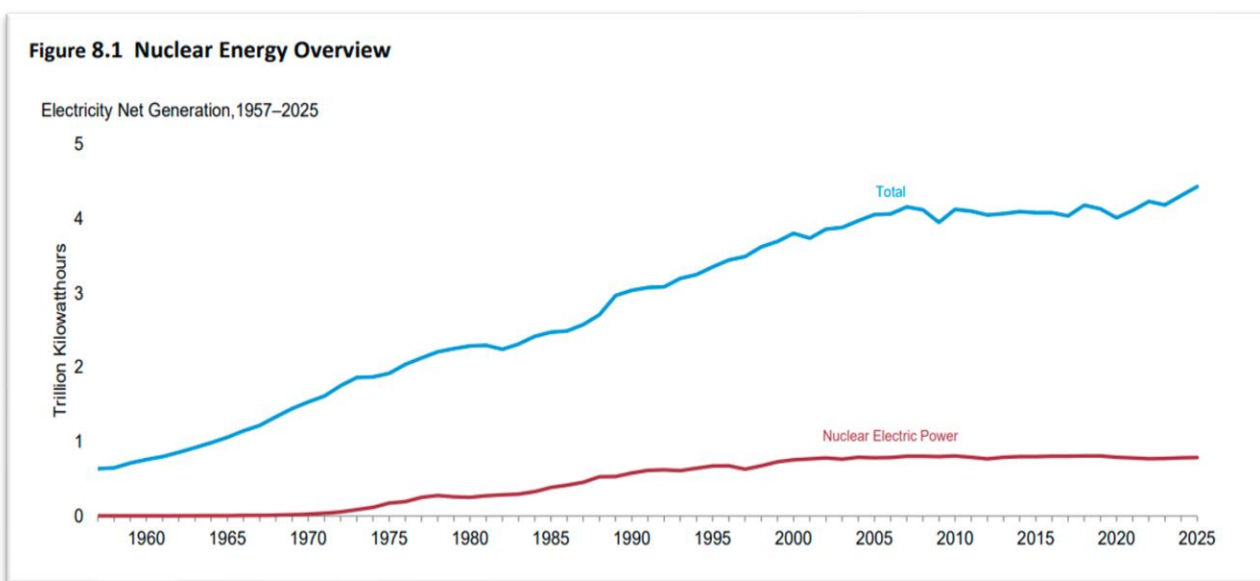
Nuclear power is already a major source of American electricity. EIA reports that the existing nuclear fleet generated nearly 785 billion kilowatt-hours in 2025, 17.7% of U.S. net electricity

¹⁸ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, [MATS Final Fact Sheet—Repeal of 2024 Amendments](#) (Feb. 2026).

¹⁹ Ted Ellis, “[AFPI Supports Repealing Clean Power Plan 2.0](#),” America First Policy Institute (Aug. 16, 2025).

generation, while operating at a 91.0% annual capacity factor. The administration has also pushed the Nuclear Regulatory Commission toward faster and more predictable reactor licensing. NRC has completed the key licensing steps needed for Palisades in Michigan to move toward restart, while restart reviews are underway at the former Three Mile Island Unit 1, now the Crane Clean Energy Center, and Duane Arnold in Iowa.²⁰

FIGURE 3 — U.S. Nuclear Energy Overview



Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, [Monthly Energy Review](#), Figure 8.1 and Table 8.1 (Aug. 2026). Table 8.1 reports 2025 U.S. nuclear net generation of 784,781 million kWh, 17.7% of total U.S. net generation, and a 91.0% capacity factor.

The administration has also paired support for large-load growth with ratepayer protection. Under the White House Ratepayer Protection Pledge, participating companies commit to secure additional generation, pay infrastructure costs associated with serving their energy needs, and protect existing consumers from stranded costs.²¹

²⁰ U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, [Palisades Nuclear Plant](#); U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, [Christopher M. Crane Clean Energy Center](#); U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, [Duane Arnold Energy Center](#). NRC has completed the principal licensing actions needed for Palisades to move toward restart, while restart reviews remain underway for Crane and Duane Arnold.

²¹ The White House, [Ratepayer Protection Pledge](#) (Mar. 4, 2026).

Ratepayer protection is also shaping policy in PJM. In January, the National Energy Dominance Council and the governors of all 13 PJM states called for a reliability backstop procurement to accelerate dependable generation and committed to pursue rate structures allocating backstop procurement costs to new data center loads that had not otherwise secured capacity or agreed to be curtailable.²² PJM subsequently proposed a procurement aimed at addressing a 6,831-megawatt shortfall identified in its latest capacity auction.²³

Those actions address immediate problems, but durable reform also requires congressional action.

KEEP: Preserve Reliable Power

America cannot afford to retire dependable generation faster than replacement capacity can be built. AFPI has proposed a reliability safe harbor that would prevent retirement of dependable resources when doing so would create or worsen a resource-adequacy shortfall.

The House has already advanced complementary approaches: the Power Plant Reliability Act would require advance notice of planned generating-unit retirements and strengthen tools for maintaining service when reliability requires it, while the Reliable Power Act would require additional review of federal actions that may affect bulk-power reliability.²⁴

Maryland's Brandon Shores and H.A. Wagner plants illustrate the problem posed by premature retirements. The plants were originally scheduled to retire in 2025, but PJM found that their retirement would create reliability problems before necessary transmission infrastructure was ready. A reliability-must-run agreement initially kept the units available through May 2029.

²² PJM Interconnection, [Reliability Backstop Procurement Workshop](#); U.S. Department of Energy, [Statement of Principles Regarding PJM](#) (Jan. 16, 2026); U.S. Department of Energy, [“Trump Administration Calls for Emergency Power Auction to Build Big Power Plants Again”](#) (Jan. 16, 2026).

²³ PJM Interconnection, [“PJM Reliability Backstop Proposal Outlines Steps to Secure New Supply and Maintain Reliability”](#) (July 31, 2026).

²⁴ [Power Plant Reliability Act of 2025](#), H.R. 3632, 119th Cong. (as passed House Dec. 16, 2025); [Reliable Power Act](#), H.R. 3616, 119th Cong. (as passed House Dec. 17, 2025).

Continued transmission delays and changing system needs have since required a further extension through 2031.²⁵

To provide appropriate guardrails where similar premature retirements are not forestalled, Congress should require sufficient reliable replacement capacity to be built and made deliverable, or otherwise procured, before dependable generation exits the system. Existing plants should also be easier to modernize. Life extensions, uprates, replacement equipment, efficiency improvements, and pollution-control upgrades can preserve valuable generating capacity while creating work for contractors, suppliers, and skilled trades. Streamlined permitting for those investments would help maintain reliability and support the small firms involved in plant modernization.²⁶

BUILD: Make America Capable of Building Again

Preserving useful existing capacity creates time to build the new infrastructure a growing economy requires. Construction of power plants, pipelines, transmission projects, and factories creates contracts for skilled trades and site contractors, domestic manufacturers, specialized suppliers, transportation companies, engineers, and maintenance firms. Congress can accelerate that activity through comprehensive permitting reform.

AFPI's near-term permitting agenda focuses on four reforms: make routine work routine; require timely decisions from agencies; right-size judicial review; and let states lead where federal law can safely recognize or delegate state work.²⁷

Make routine work routine. Maintenance, modernization, expansion, and repowering at existing or previously disturbed sites usually present more predictable risks than entirely new

²⁵ Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, [Docket No. ER24-1790](#) (Brandon Shores) & [Docket No. ER24-1787](#) (H.A. Wagner) (approving initial reliability-must-run arrangements, May 1, 2025); FERC [Docket No. ER26-2740](#) (Brandon Shores) & [Docket No. ER26-2739](#) (H.A. Wagner) (2026 extension proceedings); Adam Willis & Bria Overs, "[Regulators Green-Light Power Line Upgrades Needed to Close Last Maryland Coal Plant](#)," *The Baltimore Banner* (Aug. 7, 2026).

²⁶ Ellis, Mahmood & Salvador, *supra* note 1, at 18–19; Ted Ellis, Joshua Antonini, Jason Hayes & David Vasquez, [Building Energy Dominance: A Near-Term Permitting Agenda](#) 5 (America First Policy Institute, June 9, 2026).

²⁷ Ellis, Antonini, Hayes & Vasquez, *supra* note 26, at 3–4.

construction on untouched land. Congress should expand categorical exclusions, general permits, permit-by-rule systems, and similar pathways for recurring low-risk work.

Require timely decisions. Agencies should have clear deadlines to determine whether an application is complete and to approve or deny it once review begins. Extensions should be justified and exceptional. The House-passed SPEED Act would advance this goal as well as help simplify routine work by expanding streamlined review for qualifying projects and bringing greater discipline and predictability to the NEPA process. AFPI has supported the legislation as an important step toward faster American building.²⁸

Right-size judicial review. Legal challenges should be brought promptly, and remedies should address actual defects rather than automatically stopping entire projects. Narrow errors should receive narrow remedies on clear timelines.²⁹

Let states lead. Federal review often duplicates work already completed by state agencies. Congress should expand state assumption of federal responsibilities and allow agencies to recognize adequate and current state environmental reviews.³⁰

Senator Armstrong’s American Energy and Mineral Infrastructure Act would advance many of these principles by addressing natural-gas pipeline reviews, Clean Water Act permitting, National Environmental Policy Act scope, mining, general permits, and permitting litigation. AFPI supports the policy, and I provided a statement in support when it was introduced.³¹

Development-ready sites should receive particular attention. Retired power plants, brownfields, and former industrial properties often already have transmission access, fuel infrastructure, roads, water, trained workers, and communities familiar with industrial activity. Reusing those sites can shorten development timelines and put existing infrastructure back to work.³²

²⁸ *Id.* at 4; SPEED Act, [H.R. 4776](#), 119th Cong. (as passed House Dec. 18, 2025); America First Policy Institute, [SPEED Act: Standardizing Permitting and Expediting Economic Development](#) (Dec. 15, 2025).

²⁹ Ellis, Antonini, Hayes & Vasquez, *supra* note 26, at 4.

³⁰ Ellis, Antonini, Hayes & Vasquez, *supra* note 26, at 4.

³¹ Office of Senator Alan Armstrong, “[Senators Armstrong, Lummis, Scott, Britt, Lankford Introduce the American Energy and Mineral Infrastructure Act to Fix America’s Broken Permitting Process](#)” (2026).

³² Ellis, Mahmood & Salvador, *supra* note 1, at 19; Ellis, Antonini, Hayes & Vasquez, *supra* note 26.

Congress can also remove technology-specific bottlenecks to dependable generation. For nuclear power, predictable Nuclear Regulatory Commission timelines would make uprates, restarts, and new reactor projects easier to finance and plan. The progress toward restarting Palisades and active restart reviews at Crane and Duane Arnold show that retired nuclear sites can regain value as electricity demand, reliability needs, and the policy environment change.³³ Dependable natural-gas generation likewise requires adequate fuel infrastructure. AFPI has proposed a firm 180-day deadline for Federal Energy Regulatory Commission decisions on interstate pipelines so needed projects do not remain trapped indefinitely in sequential review.³⁴

Equipment markets show the urgency of the buildout. GE Vernova reported a combined 116 gigawatts of gas power equipment backlog and reserved production slots in mid-2026 and expects at least 125 gigawatts of gas equipment under contract by year-end. The company also reported more than \$5 billion in data center orders in its electrification business during the first half of the year.³⁵ Siemens Energy reported a 69-gigawatt gas turbine backlog, multi-year lead times, and plans to expand transformer and other high-voltage equipment manufacturing capacity by roughly 50% by 2030.³⁶

Those order books represent a near-term business opportunity for small business. Expanding domestic manufacturing capacity can translate that demand into work for American factories, contractors, component suppliers, and the small firms embedded throughout those supply chains.

PROTECT: Let Growth Strengthen Main Street

Large new customers should grow on terms that strengthen the electric system and protect existing consumers. They should bear the incremental costs and financial risks they create, while

³³ See NRC sources cited *supra* note 20.

³⁴ Hayes, Vasquez & Antonini, *supra* note 11.

³⁵ GE Vernova, “[GE Vernova Releases Second Quarter 2026 Financial Results](#)” (July 22, 2026). GE Vernova reported combined gas-power equipment backlog and slot-reservation agreements of 116 GW and said it expected at least 125 GW of gas equipment under contract by year-end.

³⁶ Emma Penrod, “[Siemens Energy’s Gas Turbine Backlog Nears 70 GW as Company Expands Manufacturing](#),” *Utility Dive* (Aug. 10, 2026); Siemens Energy, [Analyst Presentation Q3 FY26](#), at 5–6 (Aug. 5, 2026).

allowing customers and communities to share in demonstrable benefits that new generation and grid investment provide.³⁷

AFPI has proposed a three-part framework: secure enough new supply to meet the added demand; pay the generation and incremental grid costs required to serve it; and structure contracts so other customers are protected if the project changes, shrinks, or never materializes.³⁸

Utilities and regulators already have practical tools for doing this. In Virginia, the State Corporation Commission created a separate large-load rate class for Dominion customers and approved provisions including a 14-year minimum service obligation, monthly minimum charges covering at least 85% of transmission and distribution costs, and collateral requirements for some new customers.³⁹ Those protections are designed to keep infrastructure built for large loads from becoming the responsibility of other ratepayers.

That approach is especially important for small firms. If a hyperscale project causes a utility to build major new generation, substations, or transmission and the project later disappears, a dry cleaner, restaurant, or local manufacturer should not inherit the stranded cost.

Large new customers can also strengthen shared infrastructure voluntarily. They can contract for dependable generation, finance uprates at existing plants, or support grid improvements that add capacity and resilience for the surrounding community.⁴⁰

The strongest large projects can therefore deliver more than a new customer. They can add dependable power, expand infrastructure, grow the tax base, create jobs, and increase capacity for the next small business seeking to expand.

³⁷ Ellis, Mahmood & Salvador, *supra* note 1, at 1.

³⁸ Hayes, Vasquez & Antonini, *supra* note 11, at 11–12.

³⁹ Virginia State Corporation Commission, [SCC Data Center Initiatives: Facts and Figures](#) (Feb. 24, 2026). The commission's Dominion large-load provisions include a separate GS-5 class, a 14-year minimum service obligation for certain new customers, minimum monthly payments covering at least 85% of transmission and distribution costs, and collateral requirements for some customers.

⁴⁰ Ellis, Mahmood & Salvador, *supra* note 1, at 17–18, 28.

Small Businesses Help Build Tomorrow's Infrastructure

The best small-business opportunity is durable private demand for the firms that manufacture, build, transport, install, maintain, and service American infrastructure.

The Small Business Administration reports that there are more than 36 million small businesses nationwide. Small firms represent 99.9% of U.S. businesses, employ 62.3 million Americans, and generate 43.5% of U.S. economic activity.⁴¹ In construction, SBA identifies approximately 781,000 small employers with nearly 5.94 million workers.⁴²

A major energy project creates work long before it produces power. Site contractors prepare land; manufacturers supply equipment; electricians and pipefitters install it; trucking firms move components; and maintenance businesses support the facility for years afterward. The same economic pattern extends across grid, nuclear, pipeline, and other projects.

Realizing that opportunity will also require enough skilled workers to do the building. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects about 72,700 openings for electricians each year, on average, from 2025 to 2035.⁴³ Apprenticeships, technical education, and employer-led training can help ensure that workforce constraints do not become another bottleneck to American building and that small trade businesses can compete for the work.

A major infrastructure investment therefore serves as an anchor customer for an ecosystem of other firms, many of them small businesses. And the benefits can extend broadly across a regional economy. In Virginia, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission estimated that the data center industry supports roughly 74,000 jobs, \$5.5 billion in labor income, and \$9.1 billion in gross domestic product annually.⁴⁴ The Ratepayer Protection Pledge similarly makes local hiring and workforce development an explicit commitment.⁴⁵

⁴¹ U.S. Small Business Administration, Office of Advocacy, [Frequently Asked Questions About Small Business](#) (2026).

⁴² U.S. Small Business Administration, Office of Advocacy, [2025 Small Business Profiles for the States, Territories, and Nation](#), national industry table.

⁴³ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, [Occupational Outlook Handbook: Electricians](#) (last modified Aug. 27, 2026).

⁴⁴ Virginia Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, [Data Centers in Virginia](#) (Dec. 9, 2024).

⁴⁵ The White House, *supra* note 21.

Small businesses benefit twice from the energy dominance agenda. They receive a larger, more affordable, and more reliable energy system, and they help build it.

Conclusion

America is entering a period in which electricity demand, industrial investment, advanced technology, and domestic manufacturing can grow together. Energy policy should support that growth while ensuring that small manufacturers, retailers, contractors, farms, restaurants, families, and large industries can all rely on affordable, dependable power.

Congress can help by preserving generation that remains valuable to reliability, removing barriers that slow new energy and infrastructure, and ensuring that large new customers bear the costs they create.

America has the resources, workers, businesses, technology, and capital to meet the challenge. Congress can help restore the ability to put them to work. When America stops treating construction as a problem to be managed and starts treating building as a national capability to restore, Main Street does not simply receive better infrastructure; Main Street helps build it.