

**Testimony of Jim Ross**

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Chairman Upton, Ranking Member Rush, and the members of the Committee. On behalf of our president, Lonnie Stephenson, thank you for inviting me here today to participate in this important discussion.

Energy generation and power distribution is an \$800 billion a year business. With 775,000 active members and retirees, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers – the IBEW – represents approximately 400,000 workers employed in generation, transmission, distribution, construction and rail jobs, all in some way related to the electrical grid.

The IBEW supports a diverse, balanced and resilient energy portfolio that includes renewables like wind, solar and hydro, while preserving key baseload energy sources like natural gas, coal and nuclear power. These baseload power sources are extremely important to the United States' security and vital to future planning.

The need to upgrade the nation's infrastructure is getting its rightful attention these days. But left out of the recent conversation is that the United States has not made meaningful upgrades to its energy infrastructure since the 1970s.

Unfortunately, our current electric distribution system, which functions on a regional or localized basis, is outdated and inefficient. And the permitting and approval process for large-scale transmission projects is more than burdensome. It's an outright barrier to construction.

A large-scale solar installation in the desert of California. A massive new hydropower generation project in eastern Canada. And a wind farm in the Plains.

These are major renewable energy development projects the members of the IBEW have been proud to help construct in recent years.

But these generation projects of the future are only as good as the transmission network they will rely on. Their value is diminished if there is no infrastructure to take power from the source to the demand for electricity.

New investment in the transmission network is a necessary component of these renewable energy projects. And the good news is that plans exist and in some cases, are years into the necessary permitting and approval stages. In fact, approximately \$140 billion in private capital is awaiting permit approvals for aging transmission system overhauls and development of new clean lines to move more renewable sources to market.

One important method of financing infrastructure projects is through bonds and regulatory decisions can dramatically impact the bond market. Congress can also play a key role in project financing by expanding access to private activity bonds. Your support for legislation that encourages market predictability and stability will foster job creation.

It is also important to support legislation that would streamline permitting and siting processes. There are plenty of energy infrastructure projects across the U.S. that have been involved in permitting processes for years.

An example of a project pending approval is the 192-mile Northern Pass project, which will build high voltage transmission lines through New Hampshire, carrying clean hydropower from Canada to New England. It would create 2,600 jobs during peak construction and many of these would be skilled IBEW construction linemen.

Recent storms and frigid temperatures have challenged the ability of the region to meet demand for heating and electric generation. As a result, wholesale gas prices spiked more than 10 times the 2017 average price and oil-fueled turbines were employed, triggering the release of greenhouse gases and pollutants into the atmosphere. Northern Pass will relieve the massive imbalance of supply and demand in New England and introduce necessary, renewable diversity into its energy portfolio.

Another, the 750-mile high-voltage Clean Line project will deliver 4,000 megawatts of wind-generated power to major load centers in the Midwest and the East Coast, enough to power 720,000 homes.

Both of these projects promote economic development and job growth, preserve local communities and grow the tax base. But regulatory resistance from state and local jurisdictions has effectively stopped them before they could get off the ground.

For this reason, we need to empower federal authorities to approve large-scale projects of national importance that cross state lines and local government jurisdictions. With all due respect to local authorities, we need a new approach that trims unnecessary red tape and streamlines the rules created by numerous regulatory authorities.

Additionally, the federal government should take responsibility for “right-sizing” by incentivizing development of capacity in excess of current market demands. Accounting for future demand avoids the possibility of underbuilding and encourages future development of renewable electricity sources because there will be a market case to make to investors, proving they can move their generation to major markets.

Lastly, we are encouraged by recent “one-agency, one-decision” proposals which will reduce the timeline for federal environmental reviews and permitting processes. We do not support efforts to diminish current environmental protections; we simply need an efficient process.

We cannot afford to continue postponing these necessary upgrades. The United States lags behind China, Brazil, Germany and many other countries in transmission infrastructure investment.

With the federal government taking the decision-making lead, market predictability will improve, as will the IBEW’s ability to plan for training the next generation of construction linemen. It takes three years to train a journeyman lineman to perform transmission line construction and maintenance, and we anticipate the need for approximately 50,000 new powerlinemen over the next 10 years. While projects are held up, we are losing valuable training time.

By the way, our privately-operated apprenticeship training programs invest approximately \$200 million annually to equip students with the skills the market demands. For more than 70 years, the IBEW and our employer partners in the National Electrical Contractors Association have been the largest private-sector trainer of electrical workers in the nation. Together, the IBEW and NECA operate hundreds of training centers in communities across the country.

Our training programs guarantee a steady stream of skilled electrical workers necessary for the important work of modernizing and expanding our grid.

We ask for your leadership on making our modern electrical grid a reality. We remain a ready partner with our employers and elected officials from both sides of the aisle. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.