

Opening Statement
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change
Hearing on “Building a 100 Percent Clean Economy: Opportunities for an Equitable, Low-
Carbon Recovery”
September 16, 2020

Today’s hearing is the latest in the Committee’s series on building a 100 percent clean economy, which becomes even more crucial to the future of our nation and our planet by the day.

The images and the stories from the wildfires that are engulfing large parts of California, Oregon and Washington are devastating. The destruction of homes and businesses and the loss of life is heartbreaking, and the fires are producing some of the worst air quality in the world. These fires are climate fires, and it was disheartening to watch the President on the ground in California earlier this week, once again, fully deny scientific fact.

2020 is on track to be one of the two hottest years – if not the hottest year – on record. On the east and Gulf coasts, it’s been a record-breaking Atlantic hurricane season. For the first time in recorded history, 18 tropical storms have formed before October, and now Hurricane Sally is predicted to drop about 30 inches of rain on parts of the Gulf Coast.

Unfortunately, this is all a preview of what’s in store for the future if we don’t take bold, decisive action to combat the climate crisis.

And now, as the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the economic landscape, the path to 100 percent clean looks different today than it did last year. But the science-based target of transitioning to a 100 percent clean economy by no later than 2050, which we adopted last year, must remain the same. Achieving that goal remains critical if we are to avoid the most damaging and costly consequences of climate change.

In January, our Committee released a draft of the CLEAN Future Act, which outlined tools to put the United States on the path to a 100 percent clean economy. Today, we will look at how those tools, and others, can help our economy recover stronger and cleaner than it was before the pandemic.

Over the last seven months nearly 200,000 Americans have died, nearly 3.4 million Americans have permanently lost their jobs, and less than half of the 22 million jobs lost since February have been recovered. Even worse, job growth has slowed with each passing month.

This crisis has not hit all Americans equally. Communities of color have been disproportionately affected by the health and economic impacts of the pandemic. These are the same communities that have endured disproportionate exposure to air and water pollution for far too long. As we begin to recover from the current crisis, we have an opportunity and an obligation to build a fairer, better future for these communities and for all Americans.

Today we'll examine the role of the federal government in enabling such a recovery – a recovery that not only jumpstarts the economy, but one that centers on equitable, inclusive climate action.

A recent report from the Commodity Futures Trading Commission offers a startling view of the economic costs of climate inaction. The report found that climate-related extreme weather events will wreak havoc on our financial systems, undermining long-term economic growth. That dire warning builds on the federal government's prior estimates that climate change could cut U.S. gross domestic product by 10 percent by the end of the century.

These figures are alarming, but they simply confirm what we already know: that the climate crisis is real. It is devastating. And it is unfolding before our very eyes.

The public health, economic, and climate crises are all happening simultaneously, and we have no choice but to tackle all these challenges head-on as we rebuild. We must not recreate the problems of the past, but instead create a future that is cleaner, more equitable, and more inclusive.

An ambitious recovery effort focused on climate action will give us the tools to build back better and stronger, and create millions of new, good-paying jobs. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about how federal support can reinvigorate our economy and put us on the path to a cleaner, more equitable future.