

Opening Statement
Chairman Alan S. Lowenthal
Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Oversight Hearing on:

Climate Change: Preparing for the Energy Transition

February 12, 2019

The Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources will come to order.

Good morning, and welcome to the first Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee hearing in the 116th Congress.

The Subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony on climate change and preparing for the transition to a clean-energy economy.

Under Committee Rule 4(f), any oral opening statements at hearings are limited to the Chairman and the Ranking Minority Member or their designees.

I ask unanimous consent that all other Members' opening statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted to the Subcommittee Clerk by 5:00 pm today. [*pause*] Hearing no objection, so ordered.

To begin, I'd like to congratulate Ranking Member Gosar on his subcommittee leadership position. We've developed a good working relationship over the past few years, in Congress and on this subcommittee. We have already sat down together to discuss our mutual love for tamales, coffee, as well as opportunities to work together on this committee. I look forward to talking to you more on our shared priorities and ways we can work together moving forward.

I haven't actually checked this, but I believe this is the only committee or subcommittee in the House with a Chair and Ranking Member with Doctorates other than a JD. I don't know about you, but I think what the country needs now is a psychologist and a dentist.

Before I turn to the topic of today's hearing, I want to emphasize that even though we will have no shortage of policy disagreements on this subcommittee, it's my intention as Chairman to run this subcommittee in a way that keeps the discussion thoughtful and respectful, based on facts, and with an eye towards finding agreement whenever possible.

We have moved a number of bills through this subcommittee on a bipartisan basis in the last two Congresses, and I want to thank Ranking Member Gosar for working with our side on many of those bills, and I intend to continue and build on that cooperation in this Congress.

This subcommittee has a tremendously important role in our country's debate over energy and climate.

I know this is doubted by some of my colleagues on the other side, who say we have no jurisdiction over climate change and no reason to discuss it.

That is flat-out wrong.

In addition to the tremendous impacts from climate change that are affecting our public lands, those lands are responsible for nearly one-quarter of this country's greenhouse gas emissions. They also are home to some of the best renewable resources in this country, from geothermal to large-scale solar to offshore wind.

Managing our nations' vast energy resources, addressing the health and environmental impacts of energy production, and understanding the role of public lands in mitigating climate change are just a few of the critical issues we will discuss.

I want this subcommittee to be a forum where we discuss these issues and develop legislative solutions that have the buy-in from communities across the country.

In the coming weeks I look forward to sitting down individually with each member of this committee, from both parties, to get to know them and discuss their own goals and priorities in Congress and in this subcommittee.

I would also like to hold periodical, off-the-record, roundtables with the members of the subcommittee to help foster frank and honest conversation to help all of us understand each other's approach, interest, and, priorities.

Finally, I want to give a warm welcome to our witnesses and thank them for testifying this morning.

This month in the Natural Resources Committee we are discussing the impacts of climate change. Tribes, oceans, national parks, forests, and wildlife are already seeing huge consequences, and unfortunately worse is yet to come.

There must also be changes in how we produce and use energy in this country.

There is no doubt that a transition away from fossil fuels to zero-emission energy sources is essential if we are to leave a recognizable world for our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren, and beyond.

I believe this transition must happen quickly. My colleagues on the other side may not feel the same urgency. Whether this is because of the worries over disruption of jobs and their local economies or something else entirely, I hope the scientists, and storms, and floods, and climate refugees convince them there is no time to waste. I assure you – we can push for a zero-carbon energy future and have economic growth.

One thing we certainly agree on is the need to help people who may be left behind or left out as this transition occurs.

This is not new.

In 1941, there were nearly 550,000 coal miners in this country, with roughly 130,000 in West Virginia alone.

For decades, Appalachia and the workers and families that call this region home supplied the U.S. with the coal that kept the lights on and powered the world's largest economy.

Appalachian coal miners were instrumental in winning World War II.

Today, there are barely one-tenth as many coal mining jobs.

This hasn't been due to any government policy. It was because of economics and automation.

But the cause is irrelevant. The effect is thousands of out-of-work coal miners, families unsure what their children will do for a living, and whole communities practically vanishing.

The solution to this is not to provide false hope that there will be a resurrection of coal.

The solution is to provide new opportunities for workers and new options for towns to grow and thrive.

As we make the necessary transition to clean energy, other regions and other workers will face some of the same challenges.

We cannot simply sit back and watch. We must take actions to help those who may be hurt.

Some areas are already preparing. Wyoming recently released an ambitious 20-year-plan to diversify their economy and reduce the state's over-reliance on coal.

Some, however, believe they should double down on fossil fuels and hope for the best.

This is a recipe for even more hardship. Whether it's because of climate change, resource depletion, or just the normal boom-and-bust cycle of fuel prices, putting all your chips on black gold is a losing bet.

We need to support American communities and workers with the same effort and urgency that we need to confront climate change.