Committee on Energy and Commerce

Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Energy Chairman Bobby L. Rush

Hearing on "A Smarter Investment: Pathways to a Clean Energy Future"

February 18, 2021

In October 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a special report on global warming. This report made several things apparent: global emissions are on the rise, changes are necessary before 2030, and, to avoid the harshest consequences of climate change, we must reduce global emissions down to net-zero by 2050. Today, the Subcommittee meets to discuss the reinvigoration of our nation's pathway to a clean energy future toward those ends.

In 2018, the energy sector was the second-largest source of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, in 2019, approximately 46 percent of U.S. energy-related CO2 emissions came from burning petroleum fuels, 33 percent came from natural gas, and 21 percent came from burning coal. In the same year, 63 percent of U.S. electricity generation came from fossil fuels.

These past trends may seem daunting. However, reports show that a clean energy future is more than possible, and that our progress towards this goal is well underway. Case in point, renewables will account for most of the new U.S. electricity generating capacity for commercial operations in 2021. In addition, the cost of clean energy sources, like utility-scale solar power, has decreased by up to 82 percent since 2010 as a result of improved technologies and expanded market participation.

This month, the National Academies released a report on the decarbonization of the U.S. energy system. The report emphasizes that achieving net-zero carbon emissions in the U.S. by 2050 is not only feasible, but that it would also bolster the economy, increase the availability of quality jobs, and help address systemic and long-stemming social injustices. It also concludes that near-term emissions reductions may be achieved by doubling generation from non-carbon emitting sources, deploying renewables, scaling back coal and some gas, and preserving operating nuclear and hydroelectric plants.

Members of the Subcommittee, I submit to you that getting the United States back in the lead on the clean energy game is essential. There are severe consequences to our inaction. Recent manifestations of this include the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus on communities that shoulder the burden of energy generation and what is currently happening in Texas, where 4.3 million customers have endured frigid, Chicago-like temperatures without electricity.

Through our jurisdiction and membership, we have the tools and the team to address these issues and other challenges. We demonstrated this during the 116th Congress by releasing the CLEAN Future Act, a framework to get the U.S. on a path to net-zero. This year we are in pursuit of complementary policies that will increase our overall transmission capacity to support energy security, advance electric vehicle charging, drive diversity and inclusion, and increase clean energy usage via strategies, like a clean electricity standard.

It has been said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Today, colleagues, I urge the reinvigoration of our march toward a new center of gravity — and that is forward to a clean, reliable, and secure energy future. And with that, I recognize my friend and colleague, the gentleman from Michigan, Ranking Member Upton.