

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Energy
Ranking Member Kathy Castor**

***Hearing on “Oversight of FERC: Advancing Affordable and Reliable Energy for All
Americans”***

February 3, 2026

Today’s hearing comes as hardworking Americans are being crushed by a higher cost of living, including electric bills, and the U.S. electric grid is facing a new level of crisis driven by data center load growth, extreme weather, and aging infrastructure. As policymakers, it is our responsibility to help ensure that America’s energy system can provide reliable and affordable service to our neighbors back home.

Last week, NERC’s Long-Term Reliability Assessment highlighted the multiple risks that America’s electric grid faces over the next ten years as peak electricity demand is expected to increase more than 20 percent nationwide by 2035.

We’re seeing this play out in real time. More than a million people lost power during Winter Storm Fern, particularly in the Southeast. The main challenges: toppled utility poles, iced-over substations, and downed transmission lines.

The storm knocked out more than two dozen transmission lines owned by the Tennessee Valley Authority – cutting off power from utilities across Mississippi, Tennessee, and Louisiana. In Entergy’s service territory across the Southeast, at least 30 transmission lines, 860 poles, and 60 substations went out of service.

PJM reported nearly 21 GW of generation was offline during hours of peak demand – including gas, coal, and oil. In comparison, wind, solar and batteries were helping make up the difference.

NERC’s report highlights key opportunities for us to respond to the reliability crisis. First, we need to leverage load flexibility during times of grid stress, particularly for emerging large loads such as data centers. Second, we need to streamline siting and permitting, particularly for transmission. And finally, we need to adapt grid planning processes to ensure that new resources can support essential reliability services, such as voltage, frequency, ramping, and dispatchability.

That is why Democrats and power providers have been calling out the Trump Administration’s actions over the past year that have made our grid less reliable and more expensive. Secretary Burgum has required every wind or solar project on federal lands to get his personal sign-off – so last year, only one got permission to build.

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Meanwhile, Secretary Wright has canceled funding for more than three hundred energy projects throughout the United States – including a \$1.8 billion loan to Arizona Public Service to build out new transmission.

These decisions make our grid less reliable and make it harder for regulators and grid operators to do their job. But FERC – at least for the moment – stands as a stark contrast. I want to commend the Commission for its recent bipartisan actions, including the development of co-location pathways in PJM.

The Commission has worked to quickly bring new energy on to our grid, including through automation and artificial intelligence tools to improve interconnection. However, we also need to pair these efforts with effective grid upgrades and transmission planning.

I hope that my Republican colleagues can finally get serious about working with us to upgrade America's transmission infrastructure. And we need to ensure that developers of all energy types have permitting certainty and that the federal government can be a trustworthy partner.

The U.S. grid is underutilized – on average using less than half of existing grid capacity. We can build a smarter, modern grid that adds load and lowers prices, but we need the right policy and regulatory support.

The United States added over 18 GW of energy storage in 2025, more than gas and wind combined. We already have 40 GW of virtual power plant capacity deployed today, and could reach 160 GW by 2030 – that would be enough to meet 20% of peak demand.

I'm glad to see several of our Commissioners highlight grid-enhancing technologies in their written testimonies, which could quickly increase grid capacity by 15-20%. This isn't your grandparents' electric grid. There are incredible modern tools and efficiencies that can lower costs and provide the reliable power we need in the years ahead.

So let's tackle the current reliability and affordability challenges by pursuing a portfolio of solutions, including strengthening our transmission infrastructure, adding solar-plus-battery systems, expanding onshore and offshore wind power, increasing energy efficiency, and incorporating grid-enhancing technologies and demand flexibility.

There is a lot that Congress and FERC can achieve if we work together to deliver more energy and lower costs for our neighbors.

I yield back.