

Committee on Energy and Commerce

Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery

of

Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.

Hearing on “Protecting America's Energy Infrastructure in Today's Cyber and Physical Threat Landscape”

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America's energy system is under increasing threat. Russia and China have developed sophisticated offensive cyber weapons, and the proliferation of artificial intelligence technology means that every day those offensive cyber weapons grow stronger. It also means that less sophisticated adversaries – terrorist organizations without the backing of nation-states – will be able to pull off devastating cyberattacks, whether it is against the federal government, utilities, or directly against energy infrastructure assets themselves.

That is why I am pleased to see a suite of draft legislation in this hearing, including some bills reauthorizing important cybersecurity programs created by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. I'm encouraged to see my Republican colleagues now acknowledge the importance and benefits of some of the provisions of that law. Others, like the Energy Threat Analysis Center Act, are completely new, and are based off valuable testimony that this Subcommittee received last year.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about these bills because it is critical that we work in a bipartisan fashion to secure our nation's energy infrastructure from cyber and physical threats.

And as we consider the cybersecurity of our energy systems we also have to recognize the importance that energy reliability plays in our way of life. But unfortunately, I am concerned that Secretary Wright's actions at the Department of Energy are undermining that reliability.

In October of last year, the Trump Administration and Secretary Wright illegally canceled 300 energy projects across the country – stealing \$8 billion in grants for energy projects when we desperately need more energy. In July, the Administration put out an analysis desperately calling for every available megawatt of power, but Secretary Wright is directly responsible for killing projects that would have added enormous amounts of clean power to the grid.

These projects were authorized by Congress and funded through bipartisan laws. Thankfully, just yesterday, a court reversed the termination notices for a number of the illegally canceled grants, and I am hopeful that more projects sue the Department for its actions and get their funding restored.

Now the problem is it doesn't end there. Since Trump took office, the Department of Energy has shed roughly 3,500 staff, and is so understaffed in some areas that its Office of Nuclear Energy is asking for volunteers from universities to help them review novel nuclear reactor designs. That doesn't really sound like energy security to me. And late last year, the Department of Energy underwent a reorganization, closing important offices like the Grid Deployment Office, the Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations, and the Office of Manufacturing and Energy Supply Chains.

Throughout the entire process, Secretary Wright has refused to answer questions, leaving Congress with zero information and no opportunity as to what is happening at the Department. So I am hopeful, Mr. Fitzsimmons – a number of your DOE colleagues have appeared before us in the last year, but have given unsatisfactory answers, or claimed to not have any information to share. So I am hoping that you will be more responsive today.

And let's also not forget the Big Ugly Bill – or as Republicans call it beautiful, I say it's the ugly bill – which is slated to increase electricity prices by 61 percent, and endanger more than 300 gigawatts of reliable, clean generation just when we need it most. Electricity prices are up 13 percent just since Trump took office, and companies have either delayed or canceled over \$53 billion in investment in the energy sector and we've lost over 165,000 jobs in this sector.

These actions and the Big Ugly Bill are going to seriously undermine energy reliability. I am hopeful that these cybersecurity bills will be helpful – but to be honest, and I'm not taking away from them, they're really just a drop in the bucket when you look at the energy reliability problems that Republicans are creating for the American people. And those problems are just getting worse every day. In New Jersey, electricity bills are up over 20 percent. So, you know, this is a major problem for the public and I hope we can deal with it more effectively on a bipartisan basis.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.