Chairman Dingell, Subcommittee on Energy and Air Quality hearing entitled "Facilitating the Transition to a Smart Electric Grid"

Statement of Congressman John D. Dingell, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND AIR QUALITY HEARING ENTITLED â€œFACILITATING THE TRANSITION TO A SMART ELECTRIC GRIDâ€•
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Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing. Today we consider how the Federal Government might help our critical electricity sector make the transition to modern information and control technologies.

We stand to reap significant benefits from new technologies which can maximize the efficiency of our electric power delivery system:

â€¢ greater reliability;
â€¢ lower costs to consumers through more individual control of usage;
â€¢ improved ability for industry to operate proactively; and
â€¢ alternatives for improving the Nationâ€™s aging power infrastructure.

The short-hand term for these new technologies is â€œSmart Grid.â€• Our focus today is on public policies that can facilitate the rapid deployment and adoption of these technologies, without disruptions or increased costs.

There are a number of challenging requirements created by the unique nature of the electric grid that should be considered in crafting any policy.

First, the electric grid must constantly balance between ever-shifting demand and supply. Thatâ€™s not an easy task for a product that moves at the speed of light and offers no effective means of storage for later use.

Second, the product â€“ electricity â€“ must also be exceptionally reliable. In todayâ€™s computerized, high-tech society, even a momentary interruption of power can spell dramatic, costly losses in terms of work and productivity.

Third, the ever-growing demands on our aging electric infrastructure. Projections show the demand for power increasing significantly in coming years. Absent innovation, we would need to invest tremendous resources to increase capacity and ensure greater reliability.

Fortunately, â€œsmartâ€• technologies appear to address these challenges, with substantial benefits to both the electricity sector, as well as the consumer. These new technologies, by working smarter, not harder, promise electricity generation and delivery that is more efficient, economic, and environmentally responsive. It is expected that at some point â€œsmart gridâ€ technology will ultimately provide for our transportation sectorâ€™s energy needs through plug-in hybrid vehicles, even as plug-in hybrids provide valuable electricity storage back to the grid.

While this transition will not be quick or easy, the move towards â€œSmart Gridâ€• technology is coming. Again, I thank Chairman Boucher for holding this hearing to inform us about the many issues associated with this transition. I also thank the witnesses, who will provide us with important insights and recommendations.

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