

Opening Statement  
Chairman Paul D. Tonko  
Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
Hearing on “Building America’s Clean Future: Pathways to Decarbonize the Economy”  
July 24, 2019

The Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change will now come to order. Today, we are proceeding in a slightly different order. Chairman Pallone and I will each speak for no more than 4 minutes, so that we can yield the Gentleman from Virginia, Mr. McEachin, 2 minutes after the Chairmen and Ranking Members have spoken. I recognize myself for four minutes for the purposes of an opening statement.

Yesterday I joined Chairman Pallone, Energy Subcommittee Chairman Rush, and other Members of the Committee to announce support for a 100% Clean Economy by no later than 2050.

Congress is looking to this Committee to take a leading role in developing the policies to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions. This must include significant direct emissions reductions in every community, and a just & equitable transition for every American, including adversely impacted individuals and communities.

This is the first in a series of hearings to study the challenges and potential solutions before us. One thing is clear, we cannot afford to wait until 2050, or even 2030, to act. We must be prepared for the earliest opportunity with a plan that can garner support from a broad coalition.

After 10 years of Congressional inaction, today no consensus exists on the best policies to achieve this scientifically necessary target.

But we have the benefit of a panel of expert witnesses who can discuss effective pathways for decarbonization. I believe there is broad agreement that our decarbonization strategy should seek to improve energy efficiency; deploy new and preserve existing clean electricity resources; enable electrification across all sectors of the economy; and utilize carbon dioxide removal through natural and technological methods.

This core strategy will not capture all greenhouse gas emissions. We will also need development of cleaner fuels for heavy-duty transportation and new materials and processes for industrial applications. We also acknowledge that any meaningful climate action will require significant federal investments, particularly in rural, deindustrialized, and environmental justice communities, which will create new economic opportunities and accelerate the transition to a clean energy future for all.

Despite apparent agreement on this overall strategy of decarbonization, there is little consensus on which specific policy mechanisms would be most effective and fair to achieve it.

No single policy will deliver America's transition to a 100% clean economy on its own. Congress must develop economy-wide and sector-specific solutions.

And we should be clear— this target requires nothing short of transforming the U.S. economy. If we can limit economic disruptions and expand opportunities in the process, we should do so. Throughout this process, we will consider how deep decarbonization may impact communities and workers, equity and environmental justice, energy affordability and U.S. competitiveness, and processes that are difficult to decarbonize.

But we must also keep this simple fact in mind: Comprehensive climate action will create millions of good paying jobs building a clean energy and climate-resilient economy while reducing harmful pollution.

Efforts to rebuild and modernize our infrastructure, research and deploy clean technologies, promote workforce development, and ensure safe and healthy communities will strengthen American global competitiveness and economic leadership throughout the 21st century.

The work we do here will impact millions of Americans and generations to come. We have committed to ensuring this process will be open to all ideas and thoughtful in its response.

We have already engaged with numerous stakeholders and committed to them that they have a seat at this table.

A collaborative, open approach is the only way to ensure America's climate transition is not only possible, but also just and equitable.

I look forward to today's discussion as well as a rigorous, open, and honest exploration of the potential solutions in the months ahead to put America on the pathway to a clean economy.