

Opening Statement
Chairman Bobby L. Rush
Subcommittee on Energy
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on “Generating Equity: Improving Clean Energy Access and Affordability”
October 1, 2020

Good morning. The ongoing coronavirus pandemic has exposed a series of daunting truths within our nation. One of these truths is the disproportionate impact of pandemics on our most vulnerable communities and its ability to compound the structural inequalities that afflict our nation. Today, we examine these injustices as we work to achieve a clean energy economy to confront the sweeping pandemic of climate change — and to ensure equitable access to clean energy technologies and their benefits.

Communities of color, low-income communities, and indigenous communities are disproportionately burdened by traditional energy production. According to the NAACP, nearly 70 percent of Black Americans live or have lived within 30 miles of a coal-fired power plant and, as a result, experience adverse health consequences associated with the production of energy at these plants.

In addition to this, communities of color and low-income communities spend a higher percentage of their household incomes on electricity bills. According to an Energy Information Administration report, 25 million of these households have forgone necessities like food and medicine to pay their electricity bills — many of which are faced with this decision every month. In conjunction with this, low-income households are also at a higher risk of utility shutoffs, which effectively leaves them without access to a vital resource amid the ongoing pandemic.

Given these circumstances, we must improve access to clean energy technologies and the affordability of their benefits within frontline communities to lower electricity bills, improve air quality, and reduce energy insecurity. A recent report by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy demonstrates that energy efficiency and home weatherization strategies have the ability to reduce low-income energy burden by up to 25 percent. The National Renewable Energy Laboratory also suggests nearly half of all U.S. residential rooftop solar potential exists on the vacant roofs of low- and moderate-income households, who would directly benefit from access to these resources.

The Committee has worked to establish both short-term and long-term solutions to achieve these objectives through legislative proposals, like the CLEAN Future Act, and recent pandemic relief legislation to place a moratorium on utility shutoffs and to expand LIHEAP, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program. However, today it is my hope that the Subcommittee, and its witnesses, will identify pathways and potential policies to address the barriers that impede equity in clean energy accessibility and affordability within the communities that need it most.

I thank our witnesses for their participation in today’s discussion. I also thank the various stakeholders who shared their valuable insights in advance of this discussion. And with that, I yield to my friend and colleague, the gentleman from Michigan, Ranking Member Upton.