

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.**

Hearing on “The CLEAN Future Act: Powering a Resilient and Prosperous America”

March 24, 2021

Today, the Energy Subcommittee is holding its first legislative hearing on H.R. 1512, the CLEAN Future Act, comprehensive and ambitious legislation to combat the climate crisis.

This hearing will examine parts of the CLEAN Future Act that address resilience in the power sector, with an eye toward the recent Texas power crisis and policies to avoid a repeat of that tragic situation.

This morning our Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee examined the Texas power crisis. And now, this afternoon, we are talking about solutions. The CLEAN Future Act contains numerous provisions to make our power sector cleaner, more reliable and more resilient.

First, the 21st Century Power Grid program – based on legislation introduced by Representative Sarbanes – invests \$7 billion over 10 years to improve the resiliency, performance, and efficiency of the electricity grid. This critical investment should help us avoid grid failures like we saw in Texas.

The CLEAN Future Act also incorporates the Energy Resilient Communities Act – authored by Representatives Barragan and Clarke – which invests in clean energy microgrids to increase climate change resiliency.

It also includes numerous provisions to boost energy efficiency in homes, buildings, and other facilities. Reducing energy demand can lessen stress on the grid and improve overall grid reliability.

The bill also includes a suite of new provisions to enable responsible buildout of the electricity transmission system to increase reliability and achieve national clean energy goals. This increased resilience and reliability could have helped avoid some of the impacts of the extreme cold weather event in Texas, which took a crushing toll on the lives of millions of Texans.

Four million customers suffered without power for days in sub-freezing temperatures. More than 14 million people across the state were under boil-water notices, forcing them to wait in line at distribution centers just to get safe drinking water. And, tragically, at least 57 Texans died during the storm.

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As affected Texans try to piece their lives back together, many of us are left asking: How could this happen? That's why we held the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Hearing this morning.

One thing is clear: Texas grid operators should have seen this coming. Texas and surrounding states have experienced multiple extreme cold weather events over the past 40 years. And if you look at the reporting on these events, common themes emerge.

First is a failure to properly winterize power generation facilities, natural gas production facilities and other related energy infrastructure. It's also clear that natural gas facilities failed to perform as expected during extreme cold conditions. During the 2014 polar vortex, natural gas represented over 55 percent of the total outages, and in a similar cold snap in 2018, natural gas generation represented at least 70 percent of the unplanned outages.

In this recent storm, natural gas outages represented more than half the total generation forced offline in ERCOT's territory. And as far back as 2011, one report found that the pattern of natural gas production declines during extreme cold events indicated that "the level of winterization put in place by producers is not capable of withstanding unusually cold temperatures."

While nothing could have completely prevented the devastation from the storm, it is evident that at least 10 years ago, it was clear what needed to be done to prepare and no action was taken.

These extreme weather events are only going to increase in frequency and severity because of climate change. The CLEAN Future Act is designed to get us to a 100 percent clean economy by no later than 2050 and improve the resiliency of our electric infrastructure. While no one piece of legislation could have prevented the devastation experienced from this storm, my hope is that the CLEAN Future Act will serve as a foundation for exploring the best solutions to our changing climate that can help protect people in the future from suffering similar experiences. Thank you, I yield back.