

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening State as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change Chairman Paul D. Tonko
Hearing on “Securing America’s Future: Supply Chain Solutions for a Clean Energy Economy”

November 16, 2021

The Biden Administration and Democratic members of this Committee have proposed ambitious climate targets—at least 50% economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions reductions from 2005 levels by 2030, at least half of new vehicles sales are electric by 2030, and a carbon-free electricity system by 2035—as well as the policies that will ensure these targets are met.

Achieving these goals will require serious commitment and immediate action.

It will also require building an immense amount of new infrastructure and manufacturing capacity.

Production of clean energy technologies, including wind turbines, solar panels, batteries, advanced vehicles, charging equipment, and electric appliances, will need to be ramped up significantly.

And we will need low-emissions construction materials, like steel and cement, to support clean energy deployment.

The sustainable economy of the future will need to be built and manufactured.

The question that remains to be seen is whether it will be manufactured by Americans.

In recent years, we have heard bipartisan concerns about our increasing reliance on China and other foreign competitors for clean energy technologies.

This is especially true of certain critical minerals. Today, some foreign sources of lithium, cobalt, and nickel involve environmentally harmful practices and unsafe and unethical labor conditions.

In order for the United States to fully seize the opportunities of the clean energy economy, we need to develop our own resilient supply chains.

This may include domestic sources of critical minerals, as well as processing, manufacturing, and recycling capabilities.

Ambitious climate action requires nothing less than fundamental changes to our economy and our energy system.

Any change on this scale will have its challenges. I acknowledge that.

These challenges, including the need to develop domestic supply chains, are not reasons not to act, but rather reasons to discuss how to best overcome these issues in a way that benefits America's workers and entrepreneurs.

Members of Congress have two options: Use this as an excuse to oppose our domestic energy transition and guarantee that our foreign competitors dominate the global economy of the future, or do something about it.

We can support Federal policies that will enable American workers to benefit from the transition, ensuring that we are researching, developing, and deploying the next generation of clean energy technologies in the United States, and exporting them around the world.

This effort is already underway in Congress.

Last year, I worked with Congressman Curtis on a Science Committee bill to authorize a battery and critical mineral recycling research program at DOE, which was enacted in the Energy Act of 2020.

These R&D efforts can make batteries more recyclable, and future breakthroughs could support development of alternative materials and chemistries that are less reliant on critical minerals.

And yesterday President Biden signed the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act into law.

This bill included billions of dollars to support the development of domestic clean energy supply chains, particularly for battery manufacturing.

And similarly, the Build Back Better Act, if enacted, would refresh the 48-C tax credit for investment in clean energy manufacturing facilities.

Our Committee's title of Build Back Better includes billions of dollars for DOE grant and loan programs that will support manufacturing of zero-emission vehicles, charging equipment, and other innovative technologies and their components, as well as financial assistance to decarbonize energy-intensive manufacturing.

These investments will help revitalize American manufacturing, making us less dependent on foreign nations with inadequate worker and environmental protections.

But this alone will not be sufficient.

We must also enhance the recycling and reuse of critical minerals and these clean energy systems.

In Europe, more than 60% of the lithium in the economy is recovered through recycling.

Today, only 5% of lithium-ion batteries are recycled in the United States. For comparison, the U.S. recycles 97% of traditional lead-acid batteries.

Recycling policies and investments, as proposed in the CLEAN Future Act, would reduce our reliance on foreign nations' resource extraction, growing our own supply of these minerals, while creating American jobs.

As we will hear today from Dr. Switzer, there is a strong business case for this work.

We know trillions of dollars will be invested in clean energy in the years ahead, and supporting every stage of clean energy technology development will be necessary to position the United States to be the leader of the global clean energy economy.

By understanding the future needs and challenges of this transition, Congress can develop Federal policies that will enable us to build resilient, domestic clean energy technology supply chains and support millions of American manufacturing jobs.

I look forward to our witnesses' testimony, and I hope this might be an area where we can work together to support emerging American industries while reducing our reliance on foreign materials and products.