

Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Whitfield
Subcommittee on Energy and Power
Hearing on “EPA’s Proposed GHG Standards for New Power Plants and H.R. ___,
Whitfield-Manchin Legislation”
November 14, 2013

(As Prepared for Delivery)

This morning, we continue our oversight of EPA’s numerous regulations targeting the use of coal. The regulation at issue today, the proposed greenhouse gas standards for new power plants, may well be the most damaging one yet in the agency’s all-out attack on one of our nations’ most affordable, reliable energy sources, coal.

There is a great deal about this proposed rule that is concerning for states and ratepayers. The proposed rule has serious implications for the affordability, reliability, and diversity of the nation’s electricity portfolio. Today, we will examine this proposed rule and also discuss a more reasonable alternative. Senator Joe Manchin and I have released draft legislation that allows for greenhouse gas emissions reductions, but it does so in a manner that ensures coal remains a key part of America’s energy mix. It would simply provide that in setting greenhouse gas standards for new plants, that EPA base the standards on tested and proven technologies that are commercially achievable. It would also provide that Congress set the effective date for any regulations that EPA develops relating to existing power plants.

I would like to thank my good friend Senator Manchin for appearing before us today and for working with me on this commonsense alternative.

Make no mistake – EPA’s proposed GHG New Source Performance Standards would effectively ban new coal-fired generation. It would essentially require carbon capture and storage technologies, which are nowhere close to being commercially viable. Even Charles McConnell, former Assistant Secretary for Fossil Energy in the Obama administration, recently testified before Congress that it is “disingenuous” to say that CCS is ready.

And while EPA moves to finalize a rule that would spell the end of new coal-fired generation, it has also pledged to finalize regulations that go after existing sources – a one-two punch to eliminate coal as a source of electricity.

Now, I might add that some still claim that there is no direct attack on coal or fossil fuels in general. They argue that coal-fired power plant shutdowns are occurring simply because natural gas is cheaper, and that coal is a victim of nothing more than market forces. But if that was truly the case, one wonders why the Obama EPA feels the need to keep issuing rules that are nowhere close to being achievable by coal-fired power plants. In reality, while the increase in domestic natural gas production is in itself good news for our economy, this nation still needs a diversity of supply that also comes from coal and nuclear as well as renewable sources of electricity. The generation mix varies greatly across the country based on what makes sense locally, including my part of the country in Kentucky which relies heavily on coal.

America has the world’s largest coal resources, and EPA’s pending regulations to phase out or eliminate the use of coal for both new and existing power plants poses extreme risks for jobs, energy reliability, and energy security. And these regulations threaten to drive up electric bills in coal-reliant states and restrict access to energy for many Americans. We should be pursuing energy policies that will lead to more energy that is less expensive for people, rather than less energy that is more expensive for people. And this decision should be left with the American people, not with EPA to decide.

Further, many of our largest industrial competitors, including China, have been rapidly adding coal to their generation portfolio, and for good reason given its low cost and reliable performance. And none of these nations are imposing on themselves anything like EPA’s anti-coal agenda. The global economy is

sending us a clear message - the more we handicap American coal, the more we handicap American competitiveness.

Prior to the Obama administration, the EPA and states had a decades-long history of regulating coal in ways that reduced emissions without abandoning this vital energy source. And I believe that Sen. Manchin and I have tapped into that tradition of realistic and achievable regulation with our draft legislation. Our bipartisan and bicameral proposal is the commonsense way to ensure that any greenhouse gas regulations for power plants going forward are achievable.

I would conclude by noting that this hearing is about what energy policy makes sense for the American people. We need to keep the lights on and the bills low while creating badly needed jobs. And it won't happen without coal.

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