

Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Whitfield
Subcommittee on Energy and Power
Markup on H.R. 3301, the North American Energy Infrastructure Act
November 19, 2013

(As Prepared for Delivery)

We are here today to continue our work on a critical piece of legislation – H.R. 3301, the “North American Energy Infrastructure Act.” H.R. 3301 is a bipartisan energy reform bill authored by Chairman Fred Upton and Representative Gene Green. I commend my colleagues for their efforts on this legislation.

Unnecessary and duplicative barriers to the free flow of goods and commodities work against our own economic interests and those of our North American allies. This is particularly true for energy commodities. Whether it’s exporting coal to developing nations to generate affordable electricity, or importing natural gas from Canada for home heating and cooking, having access to affordable and reliable energy is critical to strong economic growth and security. When politics and government bureaucracy get in the way of responsible energy resource and infrastructure development, our economy suffers.

Achieving our common goal of North American energy independence requires a hard look at the current system for siting and constructing cross-border energy infrastructure. This is exactly what H.R. 3301 does. The bill recognizes that building the energy delivery system of the future cannot rely on the permitting processes of the past. As explained by one of our witnesses during our legislative hearing on H.R. 3301:

“It is inconceivable that the regulatory and legislative structures put in place over the past 40 years are still relevant or constructive in the New Normal of North American energy abundance. Legislation is needed not just to avoid unintended but needless impediments to the efficient (and safe) operation of America’s productive hydrocarbon industries, but also to encourage and accelerate further expansion.”

We also heard from the President of the Canadian Electricity Association who described to us the early successes of Canada’s recent energy siting and permitting reform efforts. We would be wise to follow in the footsteps of our northern neighbors in revisiting our current regulatory framework for energy infrastructure development. By modernizing and reforming the approval process for energy infrastructure projects that cross the borders of the United States, the legislation before us today takes a critical step in that direction.

I again want to thank Chairman Upton and Congressman Green for their work on H.R. 3301. It is my understanding that the Chairman and Mr. Green are working on an amendment to be introduced prior to full committee that will address some of the issues raised at our legislative hearing. This will include addressing questions raised by FERC on the scope of the 120-day trigger for certain sections of the Natural Gas Act, as well as including language reinforcing the limited cross border commodity-focused process we are establishing to replace the Presidential Permit process. I am proud to be an original co-sponsor of this legislation and I encourage all of my colleagues to support this timely and important bill.

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