

Opening Statement

JEC Hearing on “Examining the Economic Benefits of Electrifying America’s Homes and Buildings”

Wednesday, September 22 at 2:30 p.m. ET

Our country needs to modernize the way we generate, transmit, and distribute electricity. Over the last year, devastating blackouts have harmed communities across the country, from New York to California to Texas. The U.S. electric grid has at times proven inadequate for the needs of American families.

However, the answer is not to spend billions of federal taxpayer dollars to electrify every American home and business, and—just as importantly—the answer is not to fundamentally alter federal policy to regulate energy generation and consumption. Instead, we need to unshackle American industry so that new and diverse energy sources can help create a more resilient energy future.

It was not that long ago that American innovation unleashed the shale revolution, driving down natural gas prices and providing a cleaner energy option for homes and businesses. We need a similar revolution if we want to modernize our electric grid.

To clear a path for continued energy innovation, we must reform existing regulatory policies that stand in the way of investors and discourage entrepreneurs. If we want to move our energy infrastructure into the future, we need to address environmental review.

When President Nixon signed the National Environmental Policy Act—or NEPA—into law, it was meant to require agencies to consider the environmental consequences of their actions. NEPA is generally implicated when projects use federal funds or touch federal lands, which many energy projects do.

Fifty years later, this seemingly commonsense requirement has transformed into a process that requires an average of four and a half years—and sometimes almost two decades—of paperwork and litigation. The NEPA process frequently discourages and prevents critical energy infrastructure projects from being built.

The delays might be worth it if NEPA protected the environment. But environmental review is strictly procedural, meaning that it doesn't actually privilege environmental protection.

This means that paperwork and lawyers' fees are the most consistent result of the NEPA process. Federal agencies can find that the action under consideration imposes environmental harm and then theoretically decide to approve the project anyway. The process even delays projects with clear environmental benefits.

Without reform, NEPA leaves countless energy infrastructure projects in a state of bureaucratic limbo, sidelining workers, stunting innovative new technologies, and leaving communities across the country to wait for Washington to approve their future.

That's unacceptable, and it's why I've introduced the UNSHACKLE Act. This suite of bills reforms the NEPA process so that federal agencies are better empowered to carry out the law's original intent, while also making our nation's infrastructure projects affordable again.

The UNSHACKLE Act would require agencies to finish environmental assessments faster, allow them to reuse paperwork, and limit duplicative work at state and federal levels. It would apply a two-year deadline for completion of the entire NEPA process, provide fair legal parameters around project reviews, and allow states to handle NEPA review within their own borders.

These reforms shouldn't be a partisan issue. They are designed to achieve something that we all can agree on—more efficient, effective federal permitting for infrastructure projects.

Ultimately, the best energy future is one that allows the American people to innovate. Americans have made great strides pursuing breakthroughs in energy extraction, production, and technological innovations in wind, solar, hydro-electric, and other renewable forms of energy in the face of heavy-handed government control. Removing existing regulatory burdens will allow Americans to build a more sustainable future.

The ability to build, and build more quickly, will help make the U.S. electric grid more robust, resilient, and reduce the frequency of outages. It will provide cleaner, more affordable, more reliable power to American families and communities.

As we rebuild after the pandemic, we must liberate our energy sector. We must reduce regulatory barriers to developing nuclear, hydro, geothermal, and other forms of

energy. These technologies can be an important part of a competitive energy sector and a diverse energy future.

Let's get government out of the way and allow Americans to do what they do best. Reforming policies that get in the way of modernizing our energy infrastructure will boost economic prospects for American families, improve the environment, and enable us to build a better America. I am hopeful that today's hearing will convince us of the urgent need to achieve that goal.

Thank you.