

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
MINORITY (202) 225-5051
<https://oversight.house.gov>

Ranking Member Cori Bush

Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Energy Policy, and Regulatory Affairs

Hearing on “The Power Struggle: Examining the Reliability and Security of America’s Electrical Grid”

March 12, 2024

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

St. Louis and I are here today to address the safety, security, and sustainability of the nation’s electrical grid.

Decades of pollution from overuse and an overreliance on fossil fuels have disproportionately harmed marginalized communities in St. Louis and throughout the world.

Black children in St. Louis are ten times more likely to visit the emergency room for asthma than white children. Air pollution billowing from coal plants makes it harder to breathe, especially for Black communities already burdened by decades of systemic racism and environmental inequities.

Too many children in my community suffer from asthma. Too many parents, siblings, and friends die from preventable cancers.

The time for big change is now. This is quite literally a matter of life and death.

Soot pollution from coal-burning power plants is responsible for 3,800 premature deaths annually according to a new Sierra Club report. Just 17 coal plants are responsible for over half of those deaths— and Missouri is home to two of those 17. According to the report, 94 Missourians die prematurely every year due to burning coal. A separate report last year ranked St. Louis one of the “10 Worst Places in the US for Air Pollution.”

I have proudly worked toward climate friendly policies ever since the people of St. Louis sent me to Congress. I continue to fight for a Green New Deal, including my own Green New Deal for Cities bill which would provide funding directly to city, state, local, tribal, and territorial governments to respond to the climate crisis and create hundreds of thousands of green jobs in the process. One other fundamental step to mitigating the climate crisis is building a clean and renewable power grid.

In the last Congress, Democrats made significant progress toward environmental justice and a sustainable power grid, including passing the Inflation Reduction Act. That IRA is the largest investment in green energy in American history. Yet, we still have more work to do.

Congress must support federal regulators who step up and do their part to expand clean, affordable, and safe energy transmission, including FERC. The people of St. Louis sent me here to make sure they had clean and affordable energy that wasn’t making them sick. I want to work with regulators to make sure we make that a reality.

Republicans might sit here and tell you that renewable energy is a threat to our power grid; that it jeopardizes its security. This assertion is simply untrue. You know what threatens a grid dependent on fossil fuel? Climate change exacerbated extreme weather events.

In December 2022, Winter Storm Elliott struck St. Louis, bringing bitter cold and snow that strained the power grid. While St. Louis's fossil fuel-based infrastructure froze over and failed, its wind power facilities made up the shortfall. Far too many of my constituents suffered in the bitter cold. Coal and natural gas let them down, but wind power exceeded expectations.

We also cannot ignore the actions of domestic extremists, including white nationalists and white supremacists, who have violently attacked electrical grids to stoke chaos and fear.

In 2022 alone, DOE reported 163 "electric emergency incidents and disturbances," including physical attacks—a 71% increase from 2021. In December 2022, a hate group attacked the power grid in North Carolina, leaving 45,000 people without electricity, shutting down a school for five days, and leading to one person's death.

In February 2023, the Federal Bureau of Investigation filed charges against two domestic extremists who conspired to destroy power stations around Baltimore. Then again in April 2023, federal courts sentenced two more white supremacists for their scheme to destroy critical infrastructure to spark civil unrest.

These incidents can no longer be considered isolated outliers. Last year, Ranking Member Garcia, Ranking Member Raskin, and I sent a letter to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the Department of Homeland Security on extremism and energy terrorism. I am pleased that FERC is taking these threats seriously. I hope we in government can ensure these attacks are a thing of the past.

The people of St. Louis should be able to trust that the federal government takes every action to secure the power infrastructures that connect their homes, schools, offices, and hospitals.

Access to these basic utilities is a human right. That's why I have introduced a resolution Recognizing Access to Utilities as a Human Right. My bill would recognize access to water, sanitation, electricity, heating, cooling, public transit, and broadband communications as basic human rights and public services that must be accessible, safe, acceptable, sufficient, affordable, justly sourced and sustainable, climate resilient, and reliable for every person.

People shouldn't have to risk their health and wellbeing in order to keep the lights on. My constituents need to know that when they flip a switch, the lights and the heat will go on and it won't cost them a fortune. We need to get renewable energy onto the grid to reduce emissions. We need a power grid that can endure the extremes of man-made climate change.

Thank you.

####

Contact: Nelly Decker, Communications Director, (202) 226-5181