



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON  
**SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY**

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## Opening Statement

**Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)**

Full Committee Hearing:

*Lessons Learned from the Texas Blackouts: Research Needs for a Secure and Resilient Grid*

March 18, 2021

Just one month ago on Valentine's Day, Winter Storm Uri descended on Texas and broke cold temperature records across the state. Forty-eight percent of the electricity generation capacity for the Texas grid went offline due to frozen components and frozen fuel supplies. By February 16, four million Texas households were without power. Millions of Texans had no heat and no electricity for three days or more with temperatures well below freezing.

At least 70 people died as a result of Winter Storm Uri and these power outages. One of them was just eleven years old. Cristian Peneda died of hypothermia after electricity was cut off in his family's mobile home in Conroe. He had been trying to stay warm under a pile of blankets with his three-year-old brother. An eight-year-old girl and her mother died of carbon monoxide poisoning in Harris County after they ran the family car to try to stay warm.

And the electricity and heating crisis led to a severe water crisis. Water pipes burst, flooding homes. By Friday the 19th, 12 million Texans were under a boil water advisory because the water supplies had fallen too low. And all of this happened in the midst of the greatest public health crisis this country has seen in a century, when families are dealing with lost loved ones, lost jobs, illness, and isolation.

Texans deserve better.

There was a lot of discussion in the immediate aftermath of the Texas blackouts about who to blame. There was a lot of misinformation and political jockeying, too. What seems clear already is that the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, better known as ERCOT, failed to prepare its energy infrastructure for extreme weather conditions. It is unacceptable that millions of Texans were left without power for days on end during one of the worst winter storms in our state's history.

But I know there is more for us to examine about what happened in Texas, and it is our responsibility as policymakers to get answers. Why didn't the models used by the utilities see this coming? Which systems and components performed well and which failed? Could better demand response technologies have allowed the Texas grid operators to ease the burden of these

outages? What was the role of climate change in enabling the conditions for this extreme weather episode? How ready is the electricity sector for future extreme weather events, like wildfires and heat waves? Will Texas be brought to its knees if our grid is attacked by a sophisticated adversary?

If we can get a clear-eyed understanding of how these failures occurred, we can help prevent them from happening in the future. What Texans endured last month must not be in vain. We must learn from this episode and redouble our research efforts in support of a more reliable and resilient electricity sector. Last Congress, my fellow Committee Member, Mr. Bera of California, introduced a bipartisan bill with Mr. Weber to do just that, called the Grid Security Research and Development Act. I understand he intends to re-introduce this bill this Congress, and I look forward to working with him and my other colleagues on both sides of the aisle on this important effort.

Today, I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses, some of whom were also personally affected by power outages. These five panelists represent some of the foremost experts in electricity reliability in the country, and we are honored to have you with us. I hope that as the Texas legislature considers what to do in response to this crisis, they will heed the lessons that you all share with us today.

I yield to Ranking Member Lucas.