

OPENING STATEMENT

Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

“Examining Vulnerabilities to America’s Power Supply”
Joint Subcommittee Hearing

September 10, 2015

Good morning and thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would also like to thank our distinguished panel of witnesses for their testimony on this important and timely issue.

I want to echo the comments of Ranking Members Beyer and Grayson regarding the need for a critical examination of our country’s electric grid. Today’s grid is the foundation of our economy and much of our infrastructure, and millions of American homes, businesses, and livelihoods depend on its reliability.

Investing in new, diverse energy sources is an important part of securing our clean energy future, but these investments are put at risk if we don’t immediately address vulnerabilities to the grid, as well as form a plan in the event of a large-scale grid failure.

Given our current state of preparedness, a coordinated cybersecurity or terrorist attack, or a major natural disturbance of the type we’ll be hearing more about today, could leave a large portion of the United States dark for months and result in billions of dollars in economic damages. But what may be even more concerning is that it would not take such a disastrous phenomenon to render our energy infrastructure useless. Aging infrastructure presents a much more likely and just as problematic vulnerability as the more eye-catching disasters that are often mentioned as being serious threats to the grid. With no current means to quickly recover from a high magnitude power outage, we are putting the future of our country in jeopardy if we continue to ignore systemic vulnerabilities.

This issue should not be taken lightly. We have seen the massive impacts that seemingly minor, preventable incidents can have on communities, such as the Northeast Blackout of 2003 that crippled a large regional area and brought their economies to a halt for days. This led to the loss of power for 50 million people.

While this was one of the worst outages in our history, the grid is still plagued with numerous vulnerabilities over 12 years later. Intelligence professionals, scientists, and industry experts have all been urging the federal government to strengthen the nation’s power supply for years now. And for those who worry about the cost of doing so, the U.S. Federal Energy Regulatory Commission estimates that protecting the grid would cost the average rate payer merely 20 cents annually.

I am optimistic that this hearing will help to advance the progress that partnerships between governments and utilities have made so far in bolstering the grid against today’s unique security challenges. I look forward to a productive and interesting discussion. With that, I yield back.