

Christina Hayes Opening Statement before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries:

Chairman Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Let's start by remembering why we are here: Trish Terry, bundled in ski clothes, died snuggled on the couch with her husband of 50 years. Diana Rangel needed dialysis 3 times a week, but died the day before her dialysis center could reopen. Gene Taylor, who played piano with The Fabulous Thunderbirds, was found by his roommate, frozen in his bed.

Almost exactly five years ago, at the height of Winter Storm Uri, Texas could only import 800 MW on a few interregional transmission lines and lost power for 3 days or more. In contrast, the Midwest moved 13 GW of power across hundreds of lines and experienced rolling outages lasting 3 hours.

Even when the consequences are not as dire, limited ability to move power during extreme weather can lead to incredible price spikes. For instance, during Winter Storm Fern, an additional 1 GW of transfer capability from East to West across PJM would have saved \$109 million from January 24 to February 2.

As we enter a period of unprecedented load growth — due to electrification, manufacturing, and data centers - a fragile grid is unacceptable. President Trump said, “The grid is old and tired,” and he is right.

Transmission is not a luxury — it is the backbone of a modern economy. There is an urgent need for well-planned regional and interregional transmission, using the best available technology, such as grid-enhancing technologies and high-performing conductors, allows us to move power efficiently, lowering long-term costs and strengthening reliability.

And delay is expensive.

A recent WIRES study showed that the cost of a transmission line can increase by up to a third for every year of delay. The New England Clean Energy Connect transmission line, initially estimated to cost approximately \$1 billion, ultimately cost nearly \$1.5 billion after two years of delay — costs that flow straight to customer bills.

It doesn't have to be this way. Accelerating siting and permitting is a decision that Congress can make.

First, high-capacity interstate transmission lines, the lines most critical to achieving reliability and affordability particularly during extreme events, should have a one-stop shop for siting and permitting — just like natural gas pipelines do. Streamlining multiple rounds of permitting for infrastructure that is in the national interest will ensure that it is built faster and cheaper.

Second, early and well-structured community engagement is essential — not just to facilitate completion of construction, but to develop the relationship that helps owners and operators manage the line, repair damaged facilities, and expand infrastructure for the lifespan of the project which can last for 50 years or more.

Projects that engage landowners and communities early identify routing concerns sooner, build trust, reduce litigation risk, and avoid costly late-stage conflicts and ongoing ill will. That translates directly into shorter timelines and lower costs for ratepayers.

Last year, ACEG issued a report, *The PACE of Trust*, which documents how this works in practice. Consider Minnesota Power's Great Northern Transmission Line, which included more than a year of structured outreach before permits were filed: from receiving public comments, and *answering* them, to nearly a dozen workshops, plus 28 open houses with over 1,300 attendees. By identifying concerns early and adjusting the route accordingly, the 220-mile, 500-kilovolt project completed permitting in just over two years and was energized in 2020.

The goal is not *more* process — it is better process. Engagement done early and efficiently reduces risk, increases certainty, and fosters strong relationships with the community. Good developers know this, and many regulatory frameworks already implement it.

Finally, as this Committee has noted, wildfire management must also be addressed. Uncertainty around who bears the burden of catastrophic risk has raised borrowing costs and market hesitancy, ultimately leading to increased rates for customers. Mitigating risk through new technologies and vegetation management are important steps in addressing this challenge.

In short, if we want lower long-term costs, greater reliability, and a grid capable of supporting economic growth, we need more transmission — well-planned regional and interregional high-capacity lines, with streamlined siting and permitting and early, structured engagement that reduces conflict and protects ratepayers, and fosters the support of the communities where these facilities will reside for decades to come.

Thank you for considering my testimony. I look forward to your questions.