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Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce

Markup on the Home Star Energy Retrofit Act Committee Print; Grid Reliability and Infrastructure Defense (GRID) Act Committee Print; and H.R. 4451, the Collinsville Renewable Energy Promotion Act Subcommittee on Energy and Environment March 24, 2010

Today, the Subcommittee considers three pieces of legislation to boost building energy efficiency, protect the electric grid, and encourage the development of sustainable hydroelectric power.

The first piece of legislation is a bipartisan Committee print to protect the electric grid from cyber, electromagnetic weapon, and physical attacks, as well as from solar storms. I would like to thank Mr. Barton and Mr. Upton for working with me and Mr. Markey on this legislation. Our staffs have worked closely together for five months to develop this Committee print. They have had extensive discussions with interested stakeholders and agencies. It has been a good, cooperative process that has produced good, bipartisan legislation.

I'd like to commend Mr. Barrow for his leadership on this issue. The bill he introduced last year served as the starting point for this legislation. Chairman Thompson and the Homeland Security Committee also have worked very hard to educate members about the importance of protecting the grid from a range of threats and vulnerabilities.

This bipartisan legislation will provide the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) with the authorities it needs to address imminent threats to the electric grid with emergency orders, and longer-term grid vulnerabilities with standards written or approved by the Commission.

This is an important national security and grid reliability issue. We've worked hard to strike a thoughtful balance between ensuring adequate protection for the grid and placing reasonable bounds on federal regulatory authority. I encourage my colleagues to support this bipartisan legislation.

The second piece of legislation is known as Home Star. This legislation would achieve the dual goals of jumpstarting jobs in our construction and manufacturing sectors while helping Americans make their homes more energy efficient. I'd like to commend Rep. Peter Welch for his hard work in pushing to make this legislation a reality.

Home Star would establish a rebate program for the installation of energy efficient home upgrades. These rebates would encourage homeowners to hire contractors to install new heating and air conditioning systems, insulate their homes and replace drafty windows and doors. That creates jobs, saves consumers money, and cuts pollution.

Home Star has the support of a remarkably broad coalition that ranges from your local contractor to environmentalists to window manufacturers to Washington, D.C. trade associations. Why do all these groups support Home Star? Because it's a commonsense program that's good for the country.

At last week's hearing, a number of members raised the question about how this program would be paid for. It is a good question and one that Congress will need to answer before this proposal becomes law. However, I want to remind all members that the job of this Committee is to craft a sound policy that can address the nation's problems. We may face these funding issues shortly, but fortunately they do not need to be answered during this markup. Instead, if we are successful with our work, we will then work in turn with other Committees, other members, and the House leadership to explore how our program may be adequately funded.

I urge all members to help us get to that point by supporting the Home Star legislation.

Finally, the third piece of legislation is a bill sponsored by a member of our Committee, Rep. Chris Murphy of Connecticut. The bill would authorize the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to reinstate licenses for two hydroelectric projects on the Farmington River and to transfer these licenses to the town of Canton, Connecticut. After a private company lost the licenses because it failed to begin construction, the town decided to proceed with these projects, which would use existing dams to generate electricity. Mr. Murphy worked extensively with the relevant agencies and stakeholders on this legislation, including Canton and nearby towns, local and national environmental organizations, FERC, and the state regulators. The bill allows FERC to get these projects licensed expeditiously while ensuring that the appropriate environmental analysis is completed and considered. I encourage my colleagues to support this balanced bill.

Today's legislation presents an opportunity for us all to work together. I urge all members to seize that opportunity.