

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927
Minority (202) 225-3641

Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
“Protecting the Electric Grid: H.R. __, the Grid Reliability and Infrastructure Defense Act”
Subcommittee on Energy and Power
May 31, 2011

Today, the Subcommittee examines the Grid Reliability and Infrastructure Defense Act. This legislation is as bipartisan as they come.

This legislation was born out of the bipartisan realization that our electric grid simply isn't adequately protected from a range of potential threats. And, the current process for addressing vulnerabilities in the electric grid is not sufficient.

In an emergency situation where the grid faces an imminent threat, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission currently lacks authority to require the necessary protective measures. There are also an ever-growing number of grid security vulnerabilities. These are weaknesses in the grid that could be exploited by criminals, terrorists, or other countries to damage our electric grid. These same weaknesses even make the grid vulnerable to naturally-occurring geomagnetic storms.

During the last Congress, Chairman Upton, Representatives Ed Markey and Joe Barton, and I developed the GRID Act on a bipartisan basis. The majority and minority staffs had extensive discussions with interested stakeholders and agencies. We worked with many members to answer their questions, address their concerns, and consider their constructive suggestions. This cooperative process produced strong bipartisan legislation.

On April 15, 2010, the Committee favorably reported the bill by a unanimous vote of 47 to zero. And, on June 9, 2010, the GRID Act passed the House by voice vote on the suspension calendar. Unfortunately, the GRID Act did not become law in the last Congress.

I commend the Chairman for taking up the GRID Act for consideration in this Congress.

This bipartisan legislation will provide the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission with the authorities it needs to address imminent threats to the electric grid with temporary emergency orders. It also directs the Commission to address longer-term grid vulnerabilities with standards written or approved by the Commission.

In addition, the bill includes provisions that focus specifically on the portions of the grid that serve facilities critical to the defense of the United States. And the bill is budget neutral.

These are important national security and grid reliability issues. In the last Congress, we heard from the Defense Department – and from former Defense Secretaries, National Security Advisors, and CIA Directors. They told us that the changes made by this bill are critical to our national security.

I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses.

Although we are likely to hear some in industry argue against providing FERC authority to address these serious threats, we worked across the aisle in the last Congress to develop workable legislation. I hope today marks the beginning of a similar process in this Congress.

The GRID Act is simply too important to allow special interests to weaken its effectiveness. The Committee needs to act to protect the Nation's electric grid from cyber attacks, direct physical attacks, electromagnetic pulses, and solar storms.