COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY
Lamar Smith, Chairman

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Statement from Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)

Resiliency: The Electric Grid's Only Hope

Chairman Smith: Good morning. Today, the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology will examine the ongoing effort by federal agencies, industry, and the Department of Energy's (DOE) national labs to ensure that a resilient U.S. electric grid can deliver power to American homes, businesses, and essential services.

This hearing specifically will consider the recommendations made by the National Academies of Sciences' (N-A-S) in their July 2017 report identifying ways to enhance the resilience of our electricity system.

This Committee has held hearings addressing physical and cyber threats to our power system, as well as technological solutions to stop or prevent damage from these attacks.

But we often ignore the fact that damage to the power grid can and will continue to occur. We cannot predict when a cyberattack would threaten our power supply. And as we were reminded last week with the impact of Hurricane Harvey, we don't know when the next devastating natural disaster will occur.

Instead of simply focusing on threats, we should prioritize improving the resilience of our electric grid. The resiliency of the grid is the ability of system operators to prevent disruptions in power, limit the duration of a power disruption, and quickly repair potential damage.

Resiliency is also increased by incorporating data analytics and anecdotal evidence to improve preparation for future disruptive events.

Since it is not a question of "if" but a question of "when" the power grid will face significant physical and cyber threats, resiliency should be a priority for our electricity system.

Congress requested N-A-S conduct a study on the resiliency of the nation's electric system. The final report was authored by a group of academics and industry partners with a knowledge base in electrical systems, engineering, and cybersecurity.

An author of this report, Dr. William Sanders, will testify today on the N-A-S report and its recommendations.

The report recommends government and industry collaboration and improved data sharing as the primary strategy for improving the resilience of the nation's electrical system. The N-A-S report also stresses the importance of the federal government's investment in the kind of long-term, early-stage applied research and technology development that is the mission of the DOE national labs.

DOE maintains research infrastructure at national labs that is vital to better understanding and operating our electricity system. High performance computing systems can conduct complex modeling and simulations that predict potential electricity outages and plan responses to attacks.

And information sharing programs – like the Department's Cyber Risk Information Sharing Program – facilitate industry communication on shared threats. By partnering with industry through the national labs, DOE can provide critical knowledge and enable the deployment of new technology that improves grid resilience.

There are still challenges to improving resilience. The current federal programs to protect and preserve our electric grid are fragmented and complex.

Within the Science Committee's jurisdiction alone, programs to improve grid security and resiliency are funded at the Department of Homeland Security, FERC, the Department of Energy, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). And incorporating utilities across the country, both large and small, adds even more complexity.

Agencies will need to work together to simplify the information sharing process for industry. Federal agencies, including DOE, must also prioritize the early-stage research that industry does not have the capacity to undertake, this will lead to the next generation technology solutions.

I thank our witnesses today for testifying about their valuable efforts in research, and giving their insights about operations of the electric grid.

I look forward to a productive discussion about how federal agencies can work with industry to secure a resilient electric grid and what role Congress should play in providing direction and oversight to this complex process.

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