

**Earthjustice \* Center for American Progress \* Climate Action Campaign \* League of Conservation Voters \* Natural Resources Defense Council \* Sierra Club**

**Building the Affordable Energy Future - A Pathway to Rapid Clean Energy Deployment**

We are at a critical moment. Against the backdrop of the climate crisis and rising electricity demand—driven in part by the massive expansion of data centers—utility bills are increasing across the country, contributing to a growing affordability challenge. The United States has an unprecedented opportunity to meet this moment by building a clean energy future. The most affordable, fastest to deploy, and low-risk sources of new electricity are clean energy resources, particularly wind, solar, and batteries, and meeting the challenge of climate change will require building these resources while modernizing our outdated electrical transmission and distribution systems quickly and equitably.

And yet, the Trump administration is constraining this energy future by crippling wind and solar while attempting to revive expensive fossil fuels. These policy attacks are creating an energy crisis: increasing electric bills, increasing pollution, and putting the nation's health and safety at risk.

Now, Congress should enact reforms to build cost-effective clean energy and grid infrastructure at the speed needed to address the climate crisis and the affordability crisis. As the nation's leading climate and environmental organizations, we advocate for the key reforms described below as a starting point for future policy fixes. We believe that Congress must act to ensure our nation's electricity system can respond to increasing demand with clean, quick-to-deploy generation and with modern infrastructure.

We recommend the following:

1. **End the War on Wind & Solar.** Congress should enact reforms that prevent the administration from arbitrarily targeting the permits of clean energy projects and require increased transparency and public notice throughout the permitting process for all projects. Clean energy projects should be treated fairly, on a level playing field with other kinds of projects.
2. **Strengthen the Transmission System.** We recommend Congress amend the Federal Power Act to give the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) clear and exclusive authority to permit large, interstate transmission lines that meet certain thresholds, subject to other applicable environmental laws (similar to the treatment gas pipelines receive under the Natural Gas Act). As part of this reform, we recommend that Congress codify a requirement for FERC to require the costs of these large lines to be

allocated in a way that considers all the benefits of transmission and accurately allocates the costs on the basis of these benefits.

3. **Build Smarter Grids.** We recommend Congress establish federal incentives to support the deployment of grid enhancing and advanced transmission technologies (such as advanced conductors) to maximize use of the existing grid, increase capacity, and lower costs, with minimal environmental impacts and shorter implementation times.
4. **Engage Communities.** We recommend Congress codify meaningful engagement opportunities early in the permitting process. By soliciting comprehensive and regular feedback, developers and stakeholders can together protect the environment, public health, and cultural resources. Congress should also provide resources for federal, Tribal, state, and local agencies to facilitate community benefit agreements with project developers, more efficient data sharing, analysis, coordination, and stakeholder engagement. Meaningful stakeholder engagement is a prerequisite for a fast, just, and equitable transition to a clean energy economy. By improving community engagement, federal agencies, communities and project sponsors can build trust and facilitate early buy-in, laying the foundation for mutually beneficial project outcomes.
5. **Empower Agencies and Accelerate Review.** We recommend that Congress enable agencies to make informed decisions efficiently. Agencies need sufficient resources, trained staff with expertise, and certainty in their authority to regulate. Congress needs to provide resourcing to agencies to help make better decisions faster, while also reducing delays from litigation down the line. Furthermore, Congress should prioritize agency coordination and leadership should be clarified to ensure necessary information is shared and redundant processes are minimized where possible.

Congress should build on previous bipartisan legislation and double down on measures that have proven to significantly reduce permitting timelines, in order to solve structural issues that are slowing deployment of clean energy. Permitting timelines can be cut in half simply by improved management, allocation of overdue funding, better use of technology, and uniform rules for analysis of federal permitting decisions. Instead of using these existing tools to cut permitting timelines, the Trump administration has eliminated uniform regulations, gutted agency personnel, and signed legislation to terminate federal investment incentives and historic funding for project permitting. Now, Congress needs to step in and ensure those common sense reforms are restored. Without these additional reforms outlined in this framework, the U.S. will fail to meet the critical moment to build at the speed necessary to meet its present challenges.