Oral Testimony to the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis
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Good morning, Madame Chairwoman Castor and Ranking Member Graves. I’m pleased to be here today on behalf of the Energy Futures Initiative to speak to the important issue of the energy and energy efficiency workforce.

Twelve years ago, in 2007, I testified to the Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming. At that time I stated, “One of the most famous American industrialists of the 20th Century, Henry J. Kaiser, once observed ‘Problems are just opportunities in work clothes.’”

Twelve years later, I’m pleased to report that millions of Americans have put on their work clothes and got about the business of solving climate change. Today, of the 6.7 million Americans who work in the energy and energy efficiency industries over 3.5 million, more than 50%, are contributing to a lower emissions economy. 350,000 of them do this in the wind and solar energy industries, another 63,000 thousand in nuclear power plants, 66,000 in hydro, 70,000 in low emissions advanced natural gas generating plants, and thousands of others in geothermal, combined heat and power, battery storage, and many other technologies, including several hundred at the first coal-fired power plant retrofitted with carbon capture technology at the Petra Nova generating station, just south of Houston, TX.

If it is done right, with the interests of America’s middle class and working families at heart, there will be a place at the table, a job, and a pay check for every American while we solve the climate crisis. But we have to do it right.

Most of the Americans whose jobs are reducing greenhouse gas emissions today are working with energy efficiency technologies. In fact, almost 2.35 million people work in energy efficiency in the United States, retrofitting our buildings, installing LED lighting systems, and manufacturing high efficiency HVAC systems and hundreds of other EnergyStar certified products.

In transportation, almost 254,000 Americans now work manufacturing and designing hybrids, all-electrics, and plug in hybrids, while another 486,000 work in the motor vehicles’ component parts industry, specifically on those products that make our automotive fuel consumption more efficient.

This is how we solve climate change—by doing the hard work every day and getting a pay check from construction work, factory jobs, from mining critical minerals like copper, iron ore, and palladium, and designing, financing, and permitting the systems and products that create our low carbon economy.

So what are some of the effective job strategies for dealing with the disparities that are inevitable in the transition to a low carbon economy?

First, we need to embrace an “all-of-the-above”, flexible strategy toward climate solutions. There is no silver bullet that can guide our economy to a low carbon endpoint, guaranteeing CO2 reductions and a decent job for every American. But we can invest in a range of technologies and options that preserve flexibility and encourage participation by every form of energy and every community during the next decade—from renewables and battery storage in California to carbon, capture, and sequestration in Appalachia to small modular reactors in Idaho.
Second, we need to accelerate our investments in energy efficiency with a special priority on those regions of the country negatively impacted by declining use of fossil fuels.

A third strategy is to invest in energy infrastructure. The existing DOE Loan Program Office with $39 billion of existing loan authority could be particular helpful in jumpstarting such an initiative.

Fourth, we need to focus on the manufacturing supply chains that our new energy technologies are creating. The EnergyStar brand, promoted by the US EPA, is one of the strongest product marketing brands in the world, recognized as the gold standard for efficiency. Using a new EnergyStar “Made in America” procurement policy to support the manufacture of “best in class” products would be one of the best paths forward to a resurgence in American manufacturing. Carbon performance should be a universal procurement standard for government spending in the US, similar to what California recently did with its “Buy Clean” standard.

Finally, we need to address the workforce development crisis across all energy technologies, but particularly in energy efficiency.

In 2017, energy efficiency construction employers had projected hiring at 10.6% or over 120,000 new jobs, but the reality of hiring difficulty got in the way and they added only 21,000 jobs in 2018. This was a failure of our workforce development system with very real world consequences. From the environmental perspective, millions of tons of CO2 went into the atmosphere that could have been prevented. But from the human perspective, this represented over 100,000 families that could have entered the middle class with some of the best paying jobs in America.

I want to close by thanking the Committee again for this opportunity to testify. With sound economic analysis, accurate jobs’ data, and a collaborative approach we can manage our path to a low carbon economy by investing in new opportunities and new jobs first before we put old technologies on the shelf.

Thank you very much.