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Unions, Environmental Groups and Renewable Energy Developers Urge Congress to Eliminate Transmission Barriers to a Clean Energy Economy

Coalition including Utilities Workers, Steel Workers, and the Blue Green Alliance urge Congress to ensure new electricity transmission can be built to tap America's clean energy sources

WASHINGTON, DC – Leading labor unions joined environmental groups, renewable energy developers, electric utilities and other stakeholders today in asking Senate leaders to strengthen authorities in S.1462, the *American Clean Energy Leadership Act*, to enable the construction of new power lines to bring renewable energy resources to market. New electric transmission is critical to developing America's vast domestic renewable resources, creating thousands of new jobs, improving national security, and addressing the threat of global climate change.

“Bringing more clean energy to America will generate good-paying jobs that can't be outsourced. But, we can't tap that economic and energy potential without new transmission. It is critical that Congress removes this roadblock to economic growth,” **said Yvette Pena Lopes from the Blue Green Alliance.**

Transmission to bring renewable electric power from remote rural areas to American cities will generate enormous and widely shared economic, environmental, and national security benefits. By artificially and narrowly defining the benefits of new transmission, S. 1462, as amended in the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, severely limits the ability to plan, develop and integrate renewable energy into our nation's electricity grid. This approach ignores the long-held principle that the costs of large-scale transmission infrastructure with widespread benefits should be broadly shared across regions.

“If Congress wants to create jobs and support the nation's economic recovery, it should be promoting policies that enable needed infrastructure development, not prevent it. By changing the standard we use to measure transmission benefits, Congress will tie regulators' hands, and that in turn will significantly limit investment in both transmission and the energy resources that need it,” **said Denise Bode, CEO of the American Wind Energy Association (AWEA).**

The signatories note that renewable energy resources must be developed across the country – in all regions – and that in all cases new transmission infrastructure will be needed to bring renewable energy to homes and businesses. As an example, the letter cites a recent study by the Department of Energy showing that developing wind resources in the eastern United States, including both land-based wind in the Midwest and offshore wind in the East, will “require transmission infrastructure upgrades for which planning should start immediately.” Planning on a large scale is particularly important for wind and solar energy because they are constrained by their geographic location and concentrated in areas that are not currently served by major transmission lines.

“Our existing framework for planning, developing and financing transmission infrastructure is geographically fragmented, short-term focused, and procedurally cumbersome,” **said Reid Detchon, Executive Director of the Energy Future Coalition.** “Without new federal policies, our national clean energy resources will remain untapped, continuing our over-dependence on coal. We need to develop renewable energy and the infrastructure to support it in all regions of the country to meet our urgent economic, environmental, and national security goals.”

The amended legislation prohibits consideration of at least two broad benefits of clean energy: dramatically reduced environmental impacts and improved energy security. Excluding consideration of environmental benefits will also discourage steps to reduce the environmental impact of construction and siting of transmission facilities.

“Action can be taken to reduce the land and wildlife impacts of transmission lines – such as flexible routing, maximizing the use of existing rights of way, and advanced technologies to reduce impacts and losses – but these may not be employed without broad cost allocation,” **explained Carl Zichella with the Sierra Club.**

The group highlighted how a lack of transmission drives up the cost of energy for all users by limiting consumer choice in renewable energy. In recent comments, the Federal Trade Commission noted that transmission congestion “limits competition and increases power costs and prices, to the detriment of consumers.”

“Transmission makes up a small percentage of the overall cost consumers pay – from as little as four percent in some states to an average of eight percent nationwide. It is reasonable to argue that providing access to lower-cost generation, which constitutes more than 60 percent of customer bills, would lower overall costs. Even when using local resources, a small investment in transmission increases competition, reduces congestion, and lowers wholesale market prices,” **said Nina Plaushin, Vice President of Federal Affairs, ITC Holdings Corp.**

The group concluded that the Senate should remove this unnecessary barrier to renewable energy development and enact meaningful reforms to encourage rational planning, siting and cost allocation of new electric transmission.

The full text of the letter follows: