

*Senate Democrats' Special Committee on the Climate Crisis Hearing
Quality Jobs, Lower Emissions: Decarbonizing the Energy and Industrial Sectors while
Expanding Opportunities for American Workers*

Senator Smith - OPENING STATEMENT

I want to welcome everyone to the first virtual hearing of the Senate Democrats' Special Committee on the Climate Crisis.

Let us start by congratulating our colleagues on the House Climate Committee for releasing their report yesterday, and I encourage everyone to read their findings.

As we move towards finalizing our Senate Climate Report, we're here this morning to discuss how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the electric and industrial sectors in a way that works for American workers, their families, and their communities.

I am happy that former Energy Secretary Ernie Moniz and United Steelworkers President Tom Conway are joining us to share their expertise.

I also want to congratulate the BlueGreen Alliance for releasing their "National Blueprint for Clean Technology Manufacturing Leadership and Industrial Transformation" last Thursday.

I am pleased that one of our witnesses, President Tom Conway, has already entered that report as part of his testimony today.

Our country's electric and industrial sectors are what make the American way of life possible. Both are major drivers of the economy, and together they provide good paying jobs to millions of workers.

However, between them, they contribute more than half of our nation's greenhouse gas emissions.

As the world moves towards a low-carbon economy, decarbonizing the electric and industrial sectors will be key to achieving net-zero emissions by the middle of the century.

And we must make this change in a fair, just, and cost-effective way that protects communities who are part of this transition.

Decarbonizing the US economy is not only a technological challenge, but a human one too. As we face the COVID-19 economic crisis, we are constantly reminded that access to stable, well-paying jobs is critical for the wellbeing of families and communities across the country.

The pandemic has put millions of Americans out of work. The good news is that there is opportunity as we open back up to "build back better."

As we learned as we rebuilt after the Great Recession a decade ago—decarbonization and the clean energy sector provides opportunities put Americans to work quickly.

Prior to COVID, the energy sector was a particularly strong driver of job growth. That sector generated 915,000 new jobs over the last five years, outperforming overall national employment growth two-to-one.

Many states and utilities have already begun the hard work of decarbonizing. In 2018, Minnesota's Xcel energy became the first major utility in the country to make a commitment to 100 percent carbon free electricity by 2050.

This year, Minnesota's Great River Energy announced a plan to greatly increase its investment in wind energy.

Perhaps most important to our discussion today, however, is Minnesota Power, the third largest utility in my state. 74 percent of the electricity sold by MN Power goes to industrial customers, and most of that goes to just 10 facilities: 6 taconite iron ore mines and 4 paper and pulp mills.

Like many businesses around the country, those facilities have struggled during the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic. Those facilities provide good jobs that support workers and communities-- thanks in large part to the endless efforts of the United Steelworkers.

The changes being made by Minnesota Power will help the already efficient industrial facilities on Minnesota's iron range even more so.

As we consumers choose which products to buy, some encourage us to "Buy American". Others encourage us to "Buy Clean." I encourage you to do both and point out that, "Buy American" and "Buy Clean" often amount to the same thing.

Thank you Secretary Moniz and President Conway for joining us this morning. I hope this is just the beginning of this important conversation, and I look forward to hearing your perspectives.

I will call on both of you shortly to give your testimony, but first I want to welcome a visitor from the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Ranking Member Manchin, I invite you to say a few words.