

**Testimony of Abigail Ross Hopper**

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Senate Environment and Public Works Committee

Hearing to “Examine the Federal Environmental Review and Permitting Processes, Part II”

January 28, 2026

Thank you, Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Whitehouse, and Members of the Committee for inviting me here to testify today on behalf of the Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA) regarding permitting in our country and why the moment to address this complex issue is right now.

My name is Abigail Ross Hopper, and I am the outgoing president and CEO of the Solar Energy Industries Association. Over the past nine years, I have had the opportunity to represent a thriving and growing industry with over 280,000 Americans who work in the solar and storage industry from all parts of the country.<sup>1</sup>

America's solar companies and manufacturers are deploying the energy and storage needed to keep the lights on and prices affordable across the country. To strengthen the industry's ability to deliver for communities and ensure a reliable grid, permitting reform is necessary and we strongly support your bipartisan effort to improve the process for permitting energy and transmission projects. Permitting reform must begin with making sure that any project that starts the federal process is allowed to move through the process and be considered in good faith, without unequal treatment based on project or energy source. Once the project holds a permit, that permit should be honored.

Unfortunately, the federal government's current ad hoc permitting processes for solar projects lack credibility as agencies have damaged any certainty that they will treat fairly or even consider solar and battery storage applications. In a memorandum issued on July 15th, the Department of the Interior (DOI) created 68 new layers of red tape amounting to a moratorium

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<sup>1</sup> Interstate Renewable Energy Council (IREC), *National Solar Jobs Census 2024* (published 2025).

on solar energy, requiring political appointee and Secretarial level approval for even the most minor project review.<sup>2</sup> Virtually all solar project applications are effectively disappearing in DOI, leaving most project developers in the dark as to whether the agency will ever consider their project.<sup>3</sup>

These permitting roadblocks endanger 73 GW of solar and 43 GW of battery storage projects, of which about 20 GW are on public land, representing half of all new planned power capacity in the United States. These roadblocks are threatening billions of dollars of investment at a time when demand for solar remains strong. Without this energy and new grid infrastructure to transport it, energy bills will remain on the rise and America will be unable to affordably serve rapidly growing demand driven by data centers, manufacturing, and electrification.

In December, the House of Representatives passed the Standardizing Permitting and Expediting Economic Development (SPEED) Act (H.R. 4776) which will modernize NEPA to speed permitting and prevent unnecessary litigation.<sup>4</sup> NEPA is often identified as a major obstacle to energy infrastructure projects that require federal approval. While we fully believe NEPA reform is necessary, compared to fossil fuel development, concerns about NEPA litigation delaying or stopping utility-scale solar projects appear to be overstated. While oil, gas, and pipeline projects have historically been frequent targets of NEPA-based lawsuits, recent research

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Departmental Review Procedures for Decisions, Actions, Consultations, and Other Undertakings Related to Wind and Solar Energy Facilities* (July 15, 2025).

<sup>3</sup> Reuters, "U.S. solar industry says more than 117 GW of projects stalled amid federal permitting delays" (Dec. 9, 2025); *pv magazine USA*, "U.S. solar, storage projects face risk from political obstruction" (Nov. 10, 2025).

<sup>4</sup> Congress.gov, *H.R. 4776 — Standardizing Permitting and Expediting Economic Development (SPEED) Act* (119th Congress).

has not identified any lawsuits initiated after early 2024 BLM NEPA decisions for solar projects.<sup>5</sup> NEPA litigation has played a far less significant role in constraining solar deployment than it has in limiting or delaying fossil fuel infrastructure.

The SPEED Act also included a bipartisan provision to protect projects that have already received permits. While important, this protection does not go far enough, and SEIA could not support the SPEED Act because it does not include any meaningful assurance that federal agencies will fairly consider reviews and applications for solar projects.

SEIA is eager to work with you on permitting reform legislation that unlocks many dozens of gigawatts of energy, including solar energy, storage and transmission capacity. We believe for permitting reform to achieve these goals, core principles are:

1. Ending the multi-agency federal solar moratorium with statutory protections for existing permits, prohibiting discriminatory treatment of energy projects based on technology type with concrete requirements for initiating, considering and finalizing decisions on permit applications, consultations and other routine reviews for projects on public and private land. This includes permits and reviews required by the U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and U.S. Department of Agriculture.
2. Establish certainty in federal permitting processes and reduce the timelines from application to final decision through streamlined and standardized permitting processes; clarifying the scope of environmental reviews; reducing duplicative reviews; and improving multi-agency coordination.

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<sup>5</sup> Resources for the Future (RFF), *Taking Green Energy Projects to Court: NEPA Review and Court Challenges to Renewable Energy* (Aug. 2025; updated Oct. 2025).

3. Accelerate the build-out of transmission capacity and strengthen our grid through comprehensive and forward-looking planning, stronger federal siting and permitting authorities, fair cost allocation, and accelerate grid modernization. New energy projects face multi-year delays due to aging infrastructure and limited transmission capacity. Increasing transmission capacity and strengthening the grid is critical to keeping energy bills affordable in the face of rising electricity demand.

In recent years, the American solar industry has undergone a transformation. In 2025 alone, the United States added 17.7 GW of module manufacturing capacity, and the U.S. now has every major component of the solar module supply chain.<sup>6</sup> Demand for solar power is enormous, with 250 GW of new solar capacity forecast through 2030 revealing its essential role in keeping the grid powered as data centers drive record energy demand.<sup>7</sup>

These projects represent billions of dollars in private capital investment that cannot reach final investment decision without certainty that projects will be reviewed and allowed to move forward. What is occurring today in federal permitting is not how the system should function going forward. The current level of uncertainty is insufficient to support final investment decisions, and partial reforms, while helpful, do not go far enough to unlock the scale of investment needed to meet national energy demand.

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<sup>6</sup> SEIA and Wood Mackenzie, *U.S. Solar Market Insight 2025 Year-in-Review* (Dec. 2025).

<sup>7</sup> Wood Mackenzie, *U.S. Solar Market Outlook 2025–2030* (June 2025).

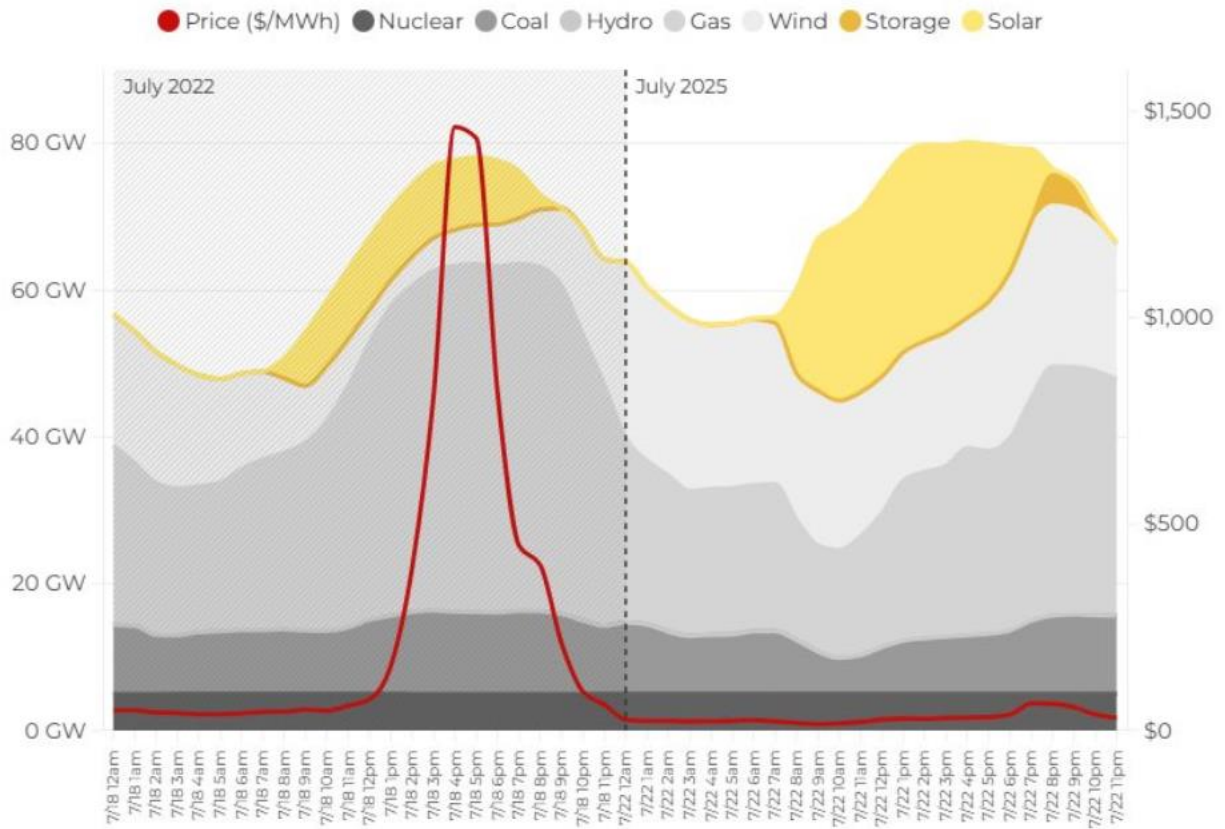
The United States needs more power, and we must allow the resource to reach the load. Solar and storage can be built right now, complementing natural gas and nuclear projects that, while important, typically take five to ten years or longer to plan, permit, and build at scale. Streamlining the permitting of solar, storage, and transmission is essential to quickly address the energy affordability crisis facing American households and businesses.

Without this energy and the transmission infrastructure needed to deliver it, electricity prices will continue to rise. The nation's power demand is increasing rapidly due to data centers, advanced manufacturing, and electrification, and the only way to put downward pressure on prices is by bringing more power online, not less. States with higher deployment of solar and storage, like Texas, are experiencing lower and more stable electricity prices.

Texas illustrates this point. This chart compares two hot summer days in July, one from 2022 and one from 2025. In 2022, ERCOT had begun installing solar on its grid, but had very little storage. When grid conditions became tight under high load, prices were high for most of the afternoon and spiked to nearly \$1,500/MWh. Three years later, the amount of solar had increased substantially and was complemented by energy storage. This time, under even higher load, sizable amounts of wind, solar, and storage helped keep prices low and stable around \$50/MWh in the middle of the day, saving Texas consumers hundreds of millions of dollars.

## Solar Protects Texans from Price Spike

Texas Load Profile 2022 v. 2025



Source: ERCOT Data Access Portal

The vast majority of the country uses more electricity during the day and early evening than it does at night due to higher air conditioning, and commercial and industrial activity during the day. This makes solar and batteries a great fit for meeting the needs of our grid. And the cost of solar has come down dramatically over the past 16 years. Unsubsidized solar has been cheaper

<sup>8</sup> Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), *Day-Ahead and Real-Time Market Settlement Point Price Data* (December 2024); RENEWfi, “Despite Cold, ERCOT Prices Remain Low” (Jan. 22, 2025).

than gas peaker plants since 2011, cheaper than new nuclear and coal since 2013, cheaper than new natural gas combined cycle since 2016, and now, in most of the U.S., solar is the cheapest source of electricity in history.<sup>9</sup> Since natural gas is still the most common fuel for electricity generation in the U.S., fluctuations in the price of natural gas due to increases in demand or supply constraints can spike the cost of electricity. Solar, with no fuel costs, provides a hedge against these spikes in electricity prices that occur periodically throughout the year and have trended upward as demand has increased from both electricity generation and LNG exports.

The consequence of this permitting dysfunction is also directly impacting American workers. The solar and battery storage industries support hundreds of thousands of jobs across construction, manufacturing, engineering, operations, and skilled trades, many of which are tied to long-term, place-based investment in rural, suburban, and industrial communities.<sup>10</sup> Permitting uncertainty disrupts workforce planning, delays hiring, and forces companies to pause or cancel projects even after significant capital has been committed. When projects cannot move through the federal review process, jobs do not materialize, apprenticeships are delayed, and domestic manufacturing facilities are unable to secure the long-term offtake certainty required to sustain operations.<sup>11</sup> At a time when the United States is actively rebuilding its energy manufacturing base, failure to provide predictable permitting timelines puts American jobs at risk and undermines the workforce pipeline needed to meet growing electricity demand.

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<sup>9</sup> Lazard, *Levelized Cost of Energy+ (LCOE+) Version 10.0* (June 2025).

<sup>10</sup> Interstate Renewable Energy Council (IREC), *National Solar Jobs Census 2024* (published 2025).

<sup>11</sup> Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA), *Solar Workforce & Manufacturing Brief* (2025); U.S. Department of Energy, *U.S. Energy Employment Report* (latest edition).

SEIA is ready to work with Congress on a comprehensive permitting solution that ensures certainty, enables investment, and allows energy projects to move forward as Congress intended. The United States has the resources, workforce, and capital ready to deploy. I believe that permitting certainty is the key to a thriving energy sector for years to come and the time to do so is now.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on such an important issue.

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