Opening Statement of Ranking Member Whitehouse
Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Hearing: "Improving the Federal Environmental Review and Permitting Processes."
February 19, 2025

Off we go again, on this bipartisan journey to catch the elusive white whale, permitting reform.

This hearing's witnesses will highlight the challenges people face building a variety of projects. But Chair Capito and I want more. We will keep our record open for a month to hear from all other interested stakeholders about their experiences. Help us find where you have encountered barriers and what solutions have worked well.

We know permitting reform is not exclusive to our committee, so we are already engaged with our colleagues in the Energy and Natural Resources Committee and in the House.

A word of warning, however: Democrats will not agree to any permitting reform unless and until the Trump administration ends its lawless disregard for congressional authority and judicial orders. Billions in obligated funds remain frozen, behind a fog bank of contumacy, in blatant disregard of constitutional separation of powers, direct court orders, and basic principles of law. As a former U.S. Attorney, I am particularly disgusted with DOJ, where things are so bad that deeply conservative career prosectors have resigned rather than carry out corrupt orders from Trump cronies. But it's everywhere, and it's hurting people and projects.

Until the administration shows it will honor its oath to faithfully and impartially execute the laws, we can have zero confidence that any legislative compromise on permitting reform will be executed lawfully. It falls to my Republican friends to bring this lawless unconstitutional madness to an end. It's on you.

On energy, we have particular reason to doubt the Trump administration will faithfully execute any law we pass. The President has declared a fake energy emergency, despite record production in America; and defined energy to exclude renewables, the fastest growing energy sector; all after receiving — minimum — a hundred million dollars from fossil fuel donors. We are deep into a political *quid pro quo*, bought by the world's biggest polluters, and China is chortling at the spectacle.

Don't even think of getting a bill until this lawlessness stops, and don't even think of getting a bill that excludes offshore wind, an industry with great jobs, huge growth potential, and a supply chain that already extends into 40 states.

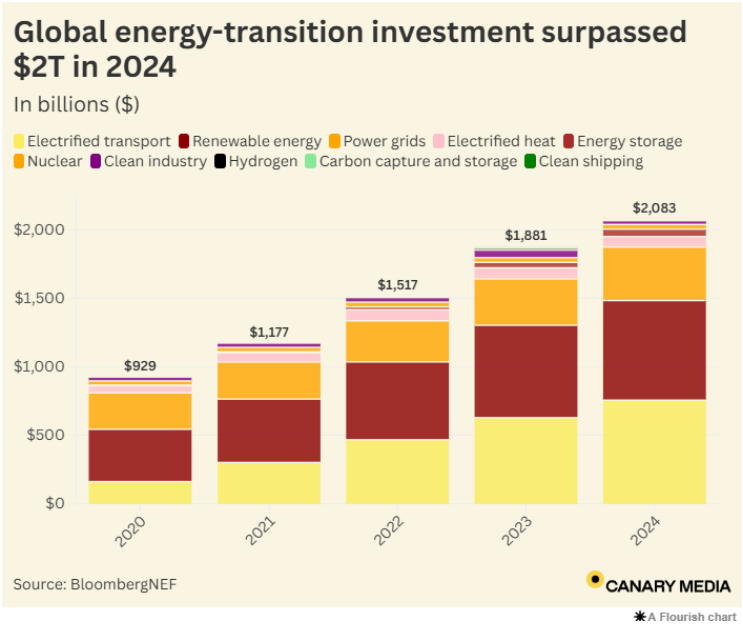
The men and women building these projects do not want them stopped, as General President Booker can attest.

Coastal states don't want them stopped – leasing has occurred in federal waters off nearly every coastal state.

Nor do the industries that support offshore wind – the Louisiana shipyards, the Midwest factories, the ports like Quonset, generating economic growth across our country.

Nor do consumers, who overwhelmingly want cheaper, cleaner, and more reliable energy.

Why would we want to pull America out of the clean energy race when investment last year topped $2 trillion, far exceeding investment in fossil fuels?



What fools we'd be. If you want a future driven by Chinese innovation, Chinese industry and Chinese power, keep it up — but you can't change the fact that the future of energy is clean, and that if we're not part of it, we will be left behind.

The North American Electric Reliability Corporation, or NERC, projects that peak demand will grow by 15% for summer peaks and 18% for winter peaks over the next ten years, raising concerns about energy shortfalls, as our Chair has pointed out in prior hearings. What would reduce the risk of a shortfall? Better permitting.

We need to build out a grid to meet current and future demand. 70% of transmission lines are more than 25 years old, and they're showing their age. We know what we need to do. We need to build, and fast.

Right now, thousands of electricity generation projects are awaiting approval to connect to the grid — as of last April, 2.6 terrawatts: millions of engineering, construction and manufacturing jobs, stalled, in part, because of our inability to build transmission lines. This must change.

As I said last week, we have entered the era of climate consequences. The stuff the scientists warned us would happen, is happening. Snicker all you want about Green New Deals, ignore all you want collapsing coastlines glaciers and coral reefs and fisheries. Pope Francis said, "slap Mother Nature and she will slap you back." The economic slap-back is here now, in

skyrocketing home insurance prices and failing home insurance markets. I will say it again: when climate havoc hits property insurance markets, it then hits mortgage markets, which then tanks property values, so hard it can take down the whole economy. You may have missed it, but last week the Fed Chairman in Senate testimony predicted that in the next 10-15 years there will be regions of the country where you can't get a mortgage any more.

When that all hits the fan, voters will be very interested in who helped and who obstructed. Pretending solar and wind energy aren't even energy will look awfully stupid. And not permitting and building a clean, modern grid will look grossly negligent. So let's stop the law-breaking and start the grid-building.