Opening Statement of Ranking Member Whitehouse Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Hearing: ""*Hearing on the Nominations of Mitch Graves, Jeff Hagood, Randall Jones, and Arthur Graham to be a Member of the Board of Directors of the Tennessee Valley Authority"*

Thank you, Madam Chair. Before I get to TVA, I want to discuss permitting reform. You and I both want permitting reform, as do colleagues on the Democratic side and the Republican side. All sorts of interest groups have pitched me on permitting reform. There is a lot to fix, and I am happy to, and will continue to, engage in these conversations.

But remember what I warn constantly about trust. Why would we want to do bipartisan permitting reform during an administration that won't faithfully execute that law, that can't be trusted? Trust matters, and the Trump administration is busily destroying any hope of that trust, with unrelenting and often illegal assaults on clean energy projects.

Off my state, they dropped an illegal "stop work" order on a project nearing completion, with $4 billion invested and every permit in place. Listen to this: when whoever it was at Moscow Central demanded the illegal "stop work" order, government lawyers had to go into court and reverse arguments they had been making, in that same courthouse about that same project, just weeks earlier. Of course, they got crushed. Trust? Good faith? Where's the good faith there? It's gangster/gong show stuff.

Two weeks ago, Interior canceled environmental review of America's largest solar energy project. The energy executive order contends that solar and wind energy aren't energy; even the dictionary is violated. This is Al Capone — or maybe I should say Oil Capone — quality stuff. And you expect anyone to believe their good faith?

The administration's "kill list" of clean energy projects starts with projects in blue states, but just wait, the full list targets red states as well. And they've already pulled permits for projects in red states like the Lava Wind project in Idaho.

On Monday, Secretary Burgum declared that he had no interest in including offshore wind in a permitting reform proposal. Well guess what? Unless these illegal acts stop and unless offshore wind is included, there will be no permitting deal. End of story.

Where are Senate Republicans? It used to be your stated principle that government shouldn't be weaponized, that government shouldn't pick winners and losers, that regulators should be honest and not "take" private property, and that lawful permits should be honored. Now you are mute while government is weaponized, picks winners and losers, illegally damages private interests, (who have lawful permits) — all because the picked winner is your friends in the fossil fuel industry? Think about that, when the winds change, when your favored industry isn't the picked winner any more.

The Republican Party has long claimed to be the party of free market capitalism, yet you're fine with this level of government interference in free enterprise? "Stop Work" Trump's interference in all these projects isn't just putting thousands of hard-working Americans out of a job, it's raising the cost of capital for *all* projects, even fossil fuel projects. Folks, this is corruption. When the government comes in and shuts down a lawful project to please its political donors, we're no longer in the United States of America, we're in Venezuela.

So, my colleagues: I will keep working on the substance of permitting reform, but that gate I've said we will need to get through, that trust check, is looking increasingly implausible. Without a drastic change in course, I am not seeing a path to a deal. Without some change in personnel, I am not seeing a path to a bill. If that's fine with you, keep it up, but don't blame me when permitting reform crashes and burns.

On the nominees to govern the Tennessee Valley Authority, which by statute must maintain "national leadership in technological innovation, low-cost power, and environmental stewardship," the Trump administration is on course to technological devolution, higher-cost power, and environmental destruction, all with fewer jobs and less accountability — but more reward for Trump's fossil fuel megadonors.

If you know how grids work, it's easy to see how reducing clean power requires more expensive, polluting fossil fuel units to meet projected demand, especially as demand surges from data centers. That money comes from ratepayer pockets through higher rates, hammering people's electric bills.

There are bright spots. In 2024, more than half of TVA's electricity came from zero-carbon sources like nuclear, hydroelectric, and renewables. TVA has led the charge on deploying advanced reactors and plans deployment of 10 gigawatts of solar by 2035. It has retired or

announced retirement of 86% of its polluting, expensive coal generation fleet. But it has approved nearly 5 gigawatts of new natural gas generation since 2019, without carbon offset or removal.

My question is, will any of the nominees before us advocate for TVA's customers, or will they roll over for Trump administration schemes to build or extend expensive, polluting fossil plants, to help out the big donors, at ratepayers' expense? Will Tennessee Valley ratepayers pay the price with higher utility bills, medical expenses, and housing and insurance costs, as climate change fuels more costly disasters?

Trump has fired three Democratic Board members, upending the convention of a bipartisan TVA Board and depriving the Board of a quorum. Are Republicans okay with that? How about when the winds change? Political interference to enrich political megadonors is the opposite of what is needed to run a utility. Tennessee's own senators have said as much: the TVA Board needs competent visionaries, not political henchmen.

Where, among the nominees, is the experience in energy? It looks more like a slate of cronies nominated to do the President's bidding and corrupt the organization they are supposed to serve; the classic pay-to-play political "spoils system" that has never worked for the public, now seems poised to wreak its havoc on TVA and on its ten million customers. If this does not end in scandal, I will be very surprised.