Top 5 Submission

Issue

The U.S environment is rapidly deteriorating due to rising greenhouse gas emissions, with projected increases in natural disasters, community damage, health hazards, and economic loss of up to 14.5 trillion by 2070 if climate change action to reduce carbon emissions is neglected. Notably, climate scientists underscore reaching 100% clean electricity by 2035 as a critical step towards a net-zero carbon emissions future by 2050. However, the current decentralized approach to large-scale U.S clean electricity generation and systemic inefficiencies in the clean energy permitting process hinders our ability to accomplish these goals.

Policy Solutions

Congress should couple a federal Clean Energy Standard (CES) with federal permitting reform to combat two major obstacles to large-scale clean energy deployment in the United States: lack of centralized direction for clean energy generation and lengthy permit processes. Specifically, Congress should implement a 80 by 30 Clean Energy Standard, in which 80% of electricity sales from utility companies must come from non-carbon emitting sources (e.g., solar, wind, hydro, nuclear) by 2030. This standard allows utility entities to earn tradable credits based on each megawatt-hour of qualified clean energy produced, making this a flexible and market-based solution. To accelerate the permitting process for clean energy infrastructure in the long term, Congress should also direct federal land-management agencies to review existing national-level maps of environmental sensitivity and environmental impact statement reports. Such permitting reviews should emphasize low environmental sensitivity areas with high capacity for clean energy infrastructure as pre-designated "go-to-areas," ensuring an accelerated review process for prospective clean energy projects.

CES Short-term Benefits:

- Princeton Net Zero America projects 500K to 1M net new jobs per year. Acquiring a clean energy wage economy promotes equity, as hourly wages exceed the national average by 8 to 19 percent.
- UC Berkeley estimates wholesale electricity costs would be about 25% lower in 2030 than in 2020.
- Energy Innovation projects 50 - 52% reduction in U.S greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.

CES Long-term Benefits:

- Clean Energy Futures approximates 317,500 premature deaths avoided through 2050, with socially marginalized groups like Black and Latine communities disproportionately benefiting.
- American Clean Power estimates a generation of $40B+ in new clean energy capital investment.
- Deloitte indicates that an early investment in clean electricity strengthens long-term market incentives to innovate and fund methods that advance decarbonization of other economic sectors.

Fiscal and Bipartisan Considerations

Even with power grid decarbonization costs of $740B, the 80x30 CES will generate a societal net benefit of $1.2 trillion by 2030 and a present value health benefit of $1.13 trillion. Benefits of the CES arise from the avoidance of both mortality costs and climate change damages. In addition to extending and creating several tax credits for utility companies to produce clean energy with decreased costs, the IRA provides $665M to federal agencies for permitting, some of which can be appropriated for the mapping functions necessary to streamline clean energy development.

In 2020, 86% of Democrats, 60% of Independents, and 40% of Republican voters stated their support for a 2035 Clean Energy Standard. In response to widespread support, elected officials are acting. Although there is political pushback from some Republicans and moderate Democrats in Congress, almost 75% of U.S. states have already adopted various forms of clean energy standards, which includes battleground states and those with both Democratic and Republican leadership. Moreover, the Chairman of the House Committee on Natural Resources Rep. Westerman (R-AR) is working with Sen. Manchin (D-WV) to garner bipartisan support for permitting reform. All together, significant state level support for clean energy standards in the top energy-producing states along with bipartisan sentiments for permitting reform indicate **that Congress could work collaboratively to enact these policy solutions.**