Testimony Script: "Energy Realism for Pennsylvania"

Mayor J.D. Longo

Chair and members, thank you for the chance to speak today. I'm JonDavid Longo, Mayor of Slippery Rock and Chair of the Pennsylvania chapter of the America First Policy Institute, here on behalf of families, small businesses, and local employers who rely on power that is affordable and reliable—especially when struck with inclement weather.

As the nation's second-largest producer of natural gas, Pennsylvania is a leader in electricity production; we generate so much power that we routinely send more electricity to our neighbors than any other state. That is a point of pride—and a responsibility.[1][2]

Our regional grid operator, PJM, is warning about stronger demand ahead, including load growth from data centers and electrification. PJM's 2025 forecasts show materially higher demand over the next two decades, and this past January PJM set a new winter peak during a deep freeze—evidence that our margin for error is shrinking.[3][4]

At the same time, PJM has flagged the risk that power plant retirements may outpace new dependable capacity. That is a reliability red flag for households and job sites alike.[5][6]

Winter Storm Elliott was the wake-up call: federal and regional reliability authorities issued detailed lessons and cold-weather standards after the storm so plants are better winterized and fuel-secure.[7][8] However, it's important that the need for weatherization in the face of extreme weather events doesn't overshadow the importance of everyday reliability in energy – by ensuring our energy comes from dispatchable sources, not intermittent sources like wind and solar.

With that reality in mind, we should keep our energy policy simple and realistic. Climate mandates, carbon taxes, and cap-and-trade schemes aren't acceptable for Pennsylvania families. Instead, double down on the proven, always-available sources that keep us safe in a storm: nuclear, coal, natural gas, and oil.

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[1] https://www.eia.gov/state/print.php?sid=PA
[2] https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=51179.
[3] https://insidelines.pjm.com/2025-long-term-load-forecast-report-predicts-significant-increase-in-electricity-demand/
[4] https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/us-pjm-power-demand-hits-preliminary-winter-record-during-winter-freeze-2025-01-22/.
[5] https://insidelines.pjm.com/pjm-details-resource-retirements-replacements-and-risks/.
[6] https://www.utilitydive.com/news/pjm-coal-gas-power-plant-risk-retirement-market-monitor/710518/.
[7] https://www.ferc.gov/news-events/news/ferc-nerc-release-final-report-lessons-winter-storm-elliott.
[8] https://www.pjm.com/-/media/DotCom/library/reports-notices/special-reports/2023/20230717-winter-storm-elliott-event-analysis-and-recommendation-report.pdf.

Still, state law makes utilities buy a government-picked slice of "alternative" power every year, instead of letting the market decide.

The current administration's "Lightning Plan" would go much further by creating PRESS, which explicitly targets 50% portfolio mandates by 2035. That might sound appealing, but it replaces consumer choice with quotas that favor weather-dependent resources and raise reliability questions.

It also advances PACER—a Pennsylvania-specific carbon pricing program akin to cap-and-invest—which is exactly the wrong direction for working families facing tight budgets.[9]

My ask is straightforward: Reject new mandates and carbon pricing; streamline permits for firm, 24/7 generation; and let markets work so my constituents and Pennsylvanians everywhere can count on the lights staying on in every season.

Jason Hayes, Policy Director for Energy & Environment, AFPI (final 3–4 minutes)

Thank you, Mayor. I'm Jason Hayes, director of Energy and Environment Policy at the America First Policy Institute. Our view is that your state's path is very straightforward: Pennsylvania should power families, businesses, data centers, and much of the PJM grid with reliable, always-available energy—nuclear, coal, natural gas, and oil—without climate mandates, carbon taxes, or quota schemes.

Right now, clean-burning natural gas supplies about 59% of Pennsylvania's in-state electricity. Nuclear supplies about 32%. These are the two pillars that carry your grid today.[10]

PJM forecasts significantly higher demand through the 2030s (driven in part by data centers), and we just saw a new winter peak this January during a deep freeze. This highlights the need to add dependable supply. [11][12]

PJM has warned that 30,000+ megawatts of existing generation across the region are at risk of retirement this decade. If we let reliable plants disappear faster than firm replacements arrive, we invite volatility and outages. [13] That's why elected officials in PA should ensure

[9] https://www.rggi.org/program-overview-and-design/elements.
[10] https://www.eia.gov/electricity/state/pennsylvania/.
[11] https://insidelines.pjm.com/2025-long-term-load-forecast-report-predicts-significant-increase-in-electricity-demand/
[12] https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/us-pjm-power-demand-hits-preliminary-winter-record-during-winter-freeze-2025-01-22/.
[13] https://www.monitoringanalytics.com/reports/PJM_State_of_the_Market/2024/2024-som-pjm-vol1.pdf.

that any new generation added to your state's energy supply either maintains or strengthens grid reliability. Non-dispatchable sources must ensure they have reliable back-up AND they must include the cost of that backup in their price forecasts. That ensures ratepayers aren't caught off guard.

The Shapiro administration's "Lightning Plan" advances two significant policies: PRESS, which would raise portfolio mandates to 50% by 2035, and PACER, a Pennsylvania-specific carbon-pricing scheme. Whatever the intentions underlying these plans, they are unacceptable mandates and a carbon tax by another name.[14]

Independent analyses project significant price increases under PACER + PRESS—the Commonwealth Foundation's modeling estimates roughly $157.2 billion in added statewide electricity costs by 2035 (about $155B from PRESS compliance and $2.2B from PACER). At the same time, reporting shows PJM region costs are already rising amid tight supply and data-center demand—mandates and carbon pricing would add more pressure.[15] [16]

Even in those estimates, PRESS's expanded mandates account for almost all the projected cost hit, dwarfing PACER, making PRESS the most significant economic risk in the Lightning Plan.[17] [18]

The electric-power sector's CO_2 emissions have fallen markedly since the mid-2000s, and Pennsylvania remains among the top-producing electricity states. Any way you slice it, it is a fiction that heavy-handed mandates are required to improve environmental outcomes for Pennsylvanians.[19] [20]

My recommendations to the Keystone State are these: Cut red tape across the board, speed up siting and permitting for firm, reliable, dispatchable (or 24/7) generation, and let competitive markets attract the affordable, reliable energy PJM says we need. No new climate mandates. No carbon taxes. No expanded quota schemes. That is energy realism and the surest path to affordable, reliable power for Pennsylvania.

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[14] https://www.pa.gov/governor/newsroom/2025-press-releases/gov-shapiro-s--lightning-plan--moves-forward-two-key-components-.
[15] https://commonwealthfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/PACER-PRESS-Report-May-2025-DIGITAL.pdf.
[16] https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/biggest-us-power-grid-auction-prices-rise-by-22-new-heights-2025-07-22/.
[17] https://commonwealthfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/PACER-PRESS-Report-May-2025-DIGITAL.pdf.
[18] https://commonwealthfoundation.org/research/pacer-press-report/.
[19] https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=37392.
[20] https://www.eia.gov/electricity/state/pennsylvania/.