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A Bipartisan Darling: The Case for Permitting Reform in the 119th Congress

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Takeaways

- Many Americans are struggling to pay their rising electricity bills, on top of increasingly expensive basic necessities like housing, groceries, and healthcare.
- As the 119th Congress comes to a close, many of these challenges and proposed solutions will get stuck in conventional political debate. But fixing the broken permitting system is an urgent challenge that has fostered rare bipartisan agreement.
- Fixing this broken system, which has led to an aging, vulnerable grid, offers a wide range of benefits: faster clean energy buildout, improved grid reliability, leadership in the AI race, opportunities for advanced manufacturing, global economic competitiveness, and strengthened national security.

Permitting reform has emerged as a rare issue where both parties agree on the roadblocks and have political incentives to move past them. Democrats are intent on further accelerating the deployment of clean energy and modernizing energy infrastructure. Republicans have long sought to reduce bureaucratic 'red tape' and boost domestic energy production. Both sides recognize the need to secure energy affordability for their constituents and acknowledge the value of staying competitive in AI. Permitting reform is an essential lever that works towards all of these goals.

There have been false starts on this issue. In 2024, the Energy Permitting Reform Act (EPRA) advanced out of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee with a bipartisan 15-4 vote but failed to reach a vote on the floor in either chamber. But since then, electricity demand and energy costs have surged at an unprecedented rate, thanks in part to the growth in artificial intelligence and data centers.

Adding massive amounts of new energy generation is a national imperative, but buildout has been constrained by the restrictive federal permitting processes.

It's essential to capitalize on this rare political moment, hammer out an agreement, and set the stage for a modern American energy system.

5 Reasons to Champion Permitting Reform

Affordability

Inaction on permitting reform ripples through the entire economy, raising the cost of housing, food, transportation, and manufacturing. Every year, federal permitting bottlenecks restrict the supply of new energy generation and infrastructure. This drives up project costs for developers, and those costs are ultimately passed on to ratepayers. Household electricity and natural gas prices are up 8% and 13%, respectively, since mid-2024. Over 20 million Americans are already behind on their energy bills.

> A Grid Strategies report finds that for every $1 billion invested in a large-scale transmission project, each year of delay costs American consumers roughly $150–$370 million in lost benefits, such as lower fuel and capacity costs.

Permitting reform is one of the most direct ways to lower system-wide costs and deliver affordable energy to everyone.

Environment

Slow transmission buildout has long been a major climate obstacle , preventing clean, low-cost power from reaching the grid. Permitting reform is the fastest way to unlock ready-to-build clean capacity and accelerate renewable deployment. Reform would also cut both global emissions and local pollution by accelerating renewable energy and habitat restoration projects that deliver environmental and health benefits. The alternative is old, expensive, and high-polluting facilities lingering in the system while cleaner alternatives, including oil and gas technologies, get stuck in limbo.

Reliability

Aging infrastructure, rising demand from data centers and advanced manufacturing, and increasingly severe weather are putting extraordinary strain on the system. Permitting delays slow the upgrades, replacements, and new infrastructure needed to keep the grid flexible and resilient. A faster, more predictable permitting process would enable transmission, storage, and clean firm power to come online quickly to meet unprecedented

demand growth. Taking a technology-neutral approach that diversifies the energy mix significantly reduces the risk of outages when any single resource falls short. This was exemplified during Winter Storm Fern, where a recent Niskanen Center study found that while fossil generation drove the majority of outages and price spikes, wind and solar resources remained resilient, shielding consumers from widespread outages and costly disruptions.

Economic Competitiveness

Today's permitting system creates uncertainty, and uncertainty scares away investment. Instead of predictable timelines, businesses and developers face delays and litigation that can stall projects for years. That deters private capital and risks sending jobs and innovation overseas. A joint report by the National Association of Manufacturers and the Foundation for American Innovation shows that current permitting delays cost manufacturers nearly $8 billion annually. In lowering these costs, permitting reform would create the conditions for large-scale domestic investment. That means job growth across construction, engineering, manufacturing, and entire supply chains, in turn strengthening US economic leadership.

National Security

Our competitors are pulling ahead on building energy infrastructure and securing advantages in advanced technologies, from rapidly building nuclear reactors to dominating clean energy technologies and patents. China is already moving faster to deploy an energy system that powers its competitive edge on AI, betting on the need for streamlined systems to build electricity capacity at scale. The inputs that are critical to our energy grid, weapons systems, and economy should not be subject to the decision-making of our rival, who now controls roughly 70% of global refining capacity for many of the most strategically significant critical minerals. Permitting reform is essential to ensure the U.S. can harden the grid to protect from cyber attacks, power critical technologies, secure supply chains, and maintain leadership in industries central to national security.

Conclusion

Democrats may be tempted to stall on permitting reform for the perfect political moment, when they can take full credit and make clean energy and climate priorities the dominant beneficiaries. But that strategy has failed in the past, at a huge cost to all Americans.

When legislation isn't bipartisan, it isn't durable either. The lack of Republican support for the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) ultimately set up the rollbacks in the Trump administration's One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA). The current administration's

patchwork of executive orders amending the NEPA process for preferred projects has the same vulnerability.

But unlikely allies all agree that permitting reform demands federal action. Industry groups ranging from the American Petroleum Institute to the American Clean Power Association are urging congressional action. State leaders from both sides of the aisle are calling on their representatives to streamline the buildout of critical energy infrastructure.

Individual lawmakers and bipartisan caucuses will come to the negotiating table for different reasons, and have before. But the 119th Congress can be the one to solve permitting reform and ready the US energy system for the challenges and opportunities ahead.