

Testimony of
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Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Owen Squires and I am the Regional Director of the Rocky Mountain Region of the Pulp and Paperworkers' Resource Council (PPRC). We represent working men and women in the forest products industry. I would like to thank you for this opportunity to testify on their behalf.

One of the greatest challenges facing American labor people today is the high cost of energy. The escalating costs and availability of energy affects every aspect of our lives.

The wholesale cost of electricity and natural gas has increased 200 to 400% over the last decade, while wages have increased only about 7% during the same time period. My home energy costs (not including fuel for my vehicle), have increased over 60%.

Every cost increase in energy is passed directly on to labor. The butcher, the baker and the candle stick-maker must pass these higher energy costs on to their customers or run the risk of going out of business, or having to move their business out of the country. Either way, it is the worker who ultimately suffers the consequences of energy price swings.

There are trillions of cubic feet of natural gas and billions of barrels of crude oil that cannot be utilized because of environmental lawsuits or appeals. Pipelines, electrical transmission facilities and other energy transportation mechanisms are under constant attack from a segment of our society that wants to stop the modernization and exploration of all energy sources, production and distribution in this country. We need an energy policy now in order to preserve and protect the industry we now have.

The fuels of the 22nd century are on the drawing boards and they will be fantastic. But today's industry needs today's fuels -- coal, natural gas, biomass, nuclear and hydropower along with other energy sources, which are readily available today.

Nobody wants to sacrifice today's environmental safeguards for a quick energy fix. It is possible to be environmentally responsible and have a sound energy policy for the future.

In conclusion I would like to say that we are the industry of the 21st century. The world uses our products daily, they are safe and produced meeting the highest environmental standards in the world.

All we need is a level playing field, American labor and Industry can compete with anybody in the world. But when we are paying four times as much for energy and when the permitting process takes years instead of months it makes competing impossible.

On behalf of the men and women and especially the children of labor, we the members of the Rocky Mountain Region of the (PPRC) would like to thank you for inviting us to testify today.