ENERGY, TRANSPORTATION, AND ENVIRONMENT (ETE)

Resolution ETE-25-03

WILDFIRE RESILIENCE

WHEREAS, the increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events due to the effects of climate change, including catastrophic wildfires, are challenging communities across the country and the utilities that serves our citizens;

WHEREAS, in addition to their impact on individuals, communities, and public safety, wildfires can imperil energy grid operations;

WHEREAS, wildfires create the potential for liability for electric companies, even before any responsibility for a wildfire has been determined, which can include liability for significant non-economic losses;

WHEREAS, insurance companies have left certain wildfire insurance markets because of increased risks, making it difficult for companies and customers to procure appropriate or affordable insurance to address wildfire risks and losses, and this exacerbates liability concerns for companies and leaves those who have suffered losses with few resources;

WHEREAS, electric companies are making significant investments to ensure that the energy grid can provide resilient clean energy in the face of increasingly severe weather conditions;

WHEREAS, as part of these investments, they are working to limit potential wildfire ignitions related to their infrastructure, including deployment of new technologies to ensure better situational awareness and wildfire detection capabilities, selective undergrounding of high-priority lines, the use of covered conductors to limit sparking of broken lines, and expanded use of automatic reclosers with more sensitive settings to prevent sparking when debris blows into power lines;

WHEREAS, research shows that changes in the climate create warmer and drier conditions leading to longer and more active fire seasons, and while electric companies are investing to address the risks that climate change might pose, the increasing frequency and destructive force of wildfires must be addressed holistically;

WHEREAS, government and its citizens should not shoulder the burden of an expensive wildfires that could have been prevented if not for reckless negligence or careless maintenance of a utility company;

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WHEREAS, a range of other stakeholders, therefore, also must address their contributions to increased wildfire risks, which includes federal, state, and local land managers, whose practices can contribute to dangerous fuels loads, and homeowners, who increasingly are not able to procure appropriate levels of wildfire insurance and often do not employ even the most basic strategies to protect their property in the event of a wildfire.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) recognizes that increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events, such as catastrophic wildfires and associated droughts, and the associated liability threats to communities and companies;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the NBCSL supports and encourages its members to establish a Resilience Revolving Loan Funds in their respective states to support communities improving their resilience to wildfires and other issues, as it will allow them to take advantage of funding for the STORM Act that was passed as part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the NBCSL recognizes the value of electric companies in supporting national and economic security, building a resilient, clean power sector and electrifying other sectors;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the NBCSL urges state and city leaders to collaborate with regulators, policymakers, and stakeholders to develop policies to facilitate electric companies making significant investments to reduce wildfire risks, and to ensure that the energy grid can provide resilient clean energy in the face of climate change; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the NBCSL urges members of Congress to collaborate with regulators, policymakers, and stakeholders to explore a national approach to address preventing and recovering from wildfires, which should include reasonable standards for wildfire prevention that utilities should adhere to when examining their liability in the case of a wildfire, such legislation should also leave room for additional state and local regulations.

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Sponsored by: Rep. Karen Camper (TN)
Policy Committee: Energy, Transportation, and Environment (ETE)