



Committee: Senate Environment & Public Works Committee
Event: [Hearing to Examine the Federal Environmental Review and Permitting Processes, Part II](#)
Date: January 28, 2026

Executive Summary:

The Senate Environment & Public Works Committee held a hearing on January 28, 2026, to evaluate the current state of federal environmental review and permitting processes.

- Members broadly agreed that the current permitting system is too slow and unpredictable, stalling energy and infrastructure projects, raising consumer costs, and threatening U.S. competitiveness as energy demand continues to rise.
- Republicans emphasized that lengthy permitting timelines, litigation, and federal inefficiencies are preventing large-scale projects—especially in rural states—from moving forward.
- Democrats focused on ensuring permitting reform is technology-neutral, warning that political targeting of wind and solar undermines trust in reform.

Member Toplines:

[Chair Shelley Moore Capito \(R-WV\)](#): Capito stated that without necessary permitting reform, the U.S. will be unable to plan for development in the present or future. Permitting reform requires affordability, predictability, and opportunity, along with accountability at every stage of the process. Capito stressed the importance of working in a bipartisan manner on permitting reform and suggested that any permitting legislation must be project-neutral. She said that permitting reform must go beyond the *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA) to include provisions that address judicial review of fully permitted projects.

[Ranking Member Sheldon Whitehouse \(D-RI\)](#): Whitehouse stressed his support for developing a bipartisan permitting reform bill. He pointed to the Trump Administration’s stop-work orders on the Empire Wind, Revolution Wind, Vineyard Wind, and Cape Wind projects, arguing that targeting wind and solar development threatens grid reliability and raises energy costs. Whitehouse noted that he and Energy & Natural Resources Committee Ranking Member **Martin Heinrich** (D-NM) have paused permitting reform negotiations in response to the pause on solar and wind projects. He explained that there is no point to negotiating bipartisan permitting reform legislation if the Executive Branch will not apply it to all energy sources equally. Whitehouse called for permitting reform to include frontloaded stakeholder engagement.

Witness Toplines:

[Brendan Bechtel, Chair of the Smart Regulation Committee, Business Roundtable](#): Bechtel said that permitting reform is about increasing investment in the U.S., keeping jobs from going overseas, and protecting the environment. He warned that global competitors are building critical infrastructure far faster than the U.S., putting American leadership at risk in strategic sectors such as energy manufacturing and artificial intelligence (AI). Bechtel stressed that strong environmental protections and efficient permitting are not in conflict, arguing that the U.S. needs a permitting system that is both efficient and predictable.

[Brent Booker, General President, Laborers' International Union of North America \(LIUNA\)](#): Booker stressed the importance of passing permitting reform, such as the SPEED Act ([H.R.4776](#)), to reduce judicial review timelines and ensure greater project certainty. He explained that permitting reform must be technology-neutral and criticized the Trump Administration for using its executive authority to unilaterally revoke permits from approved renewable energy projects.

[Dustin Meyer, Senior Vice President of Policy, Economics, and Regulatory Affairs, American Petroleum Institute](#):

Meyer explained that unnecessary permitting delays have made it impossible for the U.S. to keep up with rising energy demand and deploy new energy infrastructure. He stressed that comprehensive permitting reform is the American Petroleum Institute's (API) top priority. Meyer called for a clear statute of limitations on project litigation, reforms to NEPA, and updates to Sections 401 and 404 of the *Clean Water Act* to restore predictability and enable timely project approvals.

[Abigail Ross Hopper, President and CEO, Solar Energy Industries Association](#): Hopper emphasized the need for technology-neutral permitting language, explaining that projects entering the federal permitting process must be allowed to move through it without discrimination based on energy source. She emphasized that streamlining permitting is necessary to address the affordability crisis and support hundreds of thousands of jobs across the U.S. Hopper also criticized a Department of the Interior memorandum that she said effectively pauses solar development by requiring secretarial approval for all solar projects on federal lands. She described solar as the cheapest energy source and argued that it should be used as a complement to natural gas and nuclear projects.

[David Terry, President, National Association of State Energy Officials](#):

Terry stressed his support for federal permitting reform and stated that the SPEED Act is an important step forward. He argued that lengthy and unpredictable permitting processes drive up energy costs, and emphasized the importance of expanding NEPA's categorical exclusions and deferring to states when they have review processes equivalent to NEPA. He also called for greater certainty that approved permits can move forward on a technologically neutral basis, as well as enhanced state, interstate, and federal cooperation.

Major Takeaways:

Permitting Certainty

- Capito and Sens. **Jon Curtis** (R-UT), **Jon Husted** (R-OH), **Cynthia Lummis** (R-WY), **Pete Ricketts** (R-NE), and **Dan Sullivan** (R-AK) argued that unpredictable and lengthy permitting timelines stall energy and infrastructure projects for years.
 - Curtis and Lummis both said that permitting delays are damaging to rural states and large-scale projects, impacting our ability to meet the rising demand for energy and housing.
 - Capito also argued that it was unique to the U.S. that projects that have already been permitted can get stuck in litigation for decades
- Whitehouse and Sens. **Alex Padilla** (D-CA), **Lisa Blunt Rochester** (D-DE), **Angela Alsobrooks** (D-MD,) and **Adam Schiff** (D-CA) warned that political targeting of specific energy sources undermines trust in reform and argued for tech-neutral permitting.
 - Rochester added that permitting reform must address recent federal actions that have undermined clean energy projects, including stop-work orders and clawbacks of previously-awarded funds.
 - Alsobrooks expressed concern that the administration has failed to implement laws as Congress intended and that federal agencies continue to delay projects that have already been approved.
 - Padilla stated that political influence should be removed from agency input and approval of energy project permits. He also called for statutory protections to prevent future administrations from blocking projects based on energy type or preference.

U.S. Competitiveness and Mitigating Delays

- Husted emphasized that China is outpacing the U.S. in permitting and construction, stressing the need to reduce delays to remain competitive. Both Husted and Blunt Rochester noted that these delays are passing increased costs onto consumers.
- Whitehouse emphasized that energy demand is increasing with the growth of AI. He warned that China has added more grid capacity since 2022 than the entire U.S. grid capacity and argued that federal delays are holding back energy that is already ready to come online.
- Schiff and Alsobrooks highlighted that solar and storage are among the fastest-growing energy technologies, and excluding them from streamlined permitting would slow deployment and increase energy costs.

Workforce Development and State Capacity

- Capito emphasized the need to invest in workforce skills essential for successful project development.
- Curtis called for granting states greater authority and responsibility in the permitting process, noting that states often have a better understanding of projects on the ground.
- Lummis highlighted job losses tied to permitting delays and emphasized the need for greater certainty to protect workers.