

Testimony of
David Butterworth, Business Agent, Pipeliners Local Union 798
Before the United States Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
“Borrowed Time: The Economic Costs of Climate Change”
538 Dirksen Senate Office Building
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Chairman Brown, Ranking Member Toomey, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today about climate change. My name is David Butterworth, and I am from Clendenin, West Virginia. I am employed as a Business Agent for Pipeliners Local Union 798. I represent approximately 6,400 Welders, Helpers, and Journeymen who build pipelines in the United States. My jurisdiction extends from Virginia to Maine, and 904 of our members live throughout the Northeast. I welded and worked on pipelines from 1998 until 2015 and was hired to my current position in January 2016.

I am here today to speak about how climate change and energy policies affect grid reliability, the country, our towns, and my membership. Local 798 has attended and spoken at just about every federal and state pipeline hearing that has taken place in the Northeast from 2016 until today. Some of these pipelines are the Atlantic Sunrise, Atlantic Coast, Mariner East, Mountaineer Express, Mountain Valley, Northeast Supply Enhancement, Northern Access, and Penn East, just to name a few. We attended and spoke at each of these hearings because we know the massive work opportunities these projects provide our membership. Our job prospects have dwindled significantly since the summer of 2018 when we peaked at 8,300 members due to Mountain Valley and Atlantic Coast being in full swing. When completed, the Mountain Valley Pipeline will provide a natural gas backup generator system to Carilion Hospital in Roanoke, VA, and will also lead to increased manufacturing and jobs in the South.

I come from a town in West Virginia where good-paying jobs are intertwined with the fossil fuel industry. My father and many others from my town helped build the Alaska Pipeline. Local 798 is made up of members from towns like this spread across our great nation. Mifflintown, PA, Olive Hill, KY, Bald Knob, AR, Oak Grove, LA, and Durant, OK are towns you have probably never heard of, but if you traveled to them, you stand a good chance of meeting a pipeliner. We were once fortunate enough to be out of the national spotlight and had to explain to people exactly what we did, and quite frankly, nobody really cared. Unfortunately for us, those days are over, and we find ourselves thrust into national politics.

This is not where we want to be. We're in the middle; middle-class union workers are feeling the squeeze between opposing sides. I find myself asking questions like, “do the policymakers and those against fossil fuels truly believe we can shut down all fossil fuels tomorrow and not fall

into utter chaos?” I ask this because during the “Texas Freeze,” where all forms of energy failed, and sadly people perished, we were shown a snapshot of the disorder that accompanies a broken grid. I also witnessed the gas hoarding that began to happen at my local gas station when the Colonial Pipeline was hacked. American citizens were filling large containers of gasoline in preparation for a nationwide gas shortage without thinking about how this would affect the next person who simply wanted to fill up their vehicle tank.

This brings me to my next point. A report published by the Columbia University Center on Global Energy Policy shows a “future continued use of natural gas for at least the next 30 years” and that “there is no quick replacement for gas in the U.S. energy mix.” Switching from coal to natural gas power generation has dropped emission levels. According to the Energy Information Administration, from 2005 to 2017, U.S. natural gas production increased by 51 percent, and CO2 emissions decreased by 14 percent. The nation’s pipeline system guarantees a safe, efficient, clean energy transition. I support efforts to curb climate change, but I do not support curbing climate change when the cost is grid reliability.

We can achieve climate goals by using common sense and American ingenuity while imploring all the above energy approaches that include carbon capture and hydrogen blending. Both methods use the existing pipeline system and will bring down climate change levels. These new techniques will be protested, and this committee, along with the rest of Congress, has the power to support agendas that keep my members working, provide grid reliability and align with the new strategies that address the current climate situation. I ask that you tune out the 10 percent of American citizens who protest literally everything, and instead listen to a person who has played a part in building the power grid.

We have the energy here, and we need to use it so that we don’t end up like Germany, whose citizens will be introduced to warming houses and natural gas rationing this winter. Please consider the plight of the grid builders stuck in the middle. We might have a better idea of how we can conquer our dilemma. This problem can be solved through hard work and the implementation of moderate policies that benefit the whole rather than the far-right and far-left fringes that continue to divide us. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.