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House Energy Policy Committee Testimony
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Good afternoon Mr. Chairman, Vice Chair Glenn, Vice Chair LaVoy and members of the committee. Thank you for holding this hearing – I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss a topic I have had extensive personal experience with.

My name is Lewis Walker, and I am a former President and Chancellor of Lawrence Technological University right here in Michigan, where I continue to serve as a professor of electrical engineering.

I have been involved in the energy field for decades now. My first job was at American Electric Power in New York City (now in Fort Wayne, IN) many years ago, and since then I have remained involved in the industry through various avenues including a grant from the Electric Power Research Institute to develop a training program for electric power system dispatchers. So, in short, I am no stranger to electricity.

Dispatchers are key to avoiding energy catastrophes – and I led the program that trained every single one in the Northeast U.S. and Southeast Canada in the mid 1980's. In fact, blackouts could often be prevented if dispatch operators were able to do everything they need to – but this requires significant investment from utilities.

Michigan's regulated utilities have already made this investment - they maintain their generation systems, take care of distribution systems, and value the safety of their workers.

This kind of investment only comes with regulation and accountability. The state's utilities have shown their commitment to 90% of Michigan's energy customers – it's time to make that 100%.

At a time when excess capacity was available, the current system was workable. However, Michigan and the Midwest are facing a looming capacity shortfall as coal plants start coming offline due to old age and environmental regulations.

Electricity is absolutely essential and there is no substitute for it. Thousands of Michigan jobs and businesses rely on reliable and affordable electric power, which is currently in danger today.

While the August 2003 blackout was not a result of inadequate supply, it dramatically highlighted the importance of electric system reliability. Lawrence Tech closed, and ALL students and workers were sent home for the duration of the blackout.

At the same time, manufacturing operations were shut down all across southeast Michigan. The same thing happened there, too – workers, whose employers had no power, were sent home with no work able to be done.

What I hope to stress to the committee is the importance of reliable power. It's not just something that we need to keep refrigerators on and air conditioners running, it's the very livelihood of hard-working people across our state. Avoiding a capacity shortfall is a very deliberate task, however, as it requires providers to commit and invest in mediation measures, long term investment and meticulous day to day operation. Michigan's regulated utilities have shown that they are committed to the hard-working people of our state, capable and dedicated to the long term investment needed to provide high quality adequate and reliable electric power.

It's time to pass a comprehensive energy policy that works for all Michiganders. Chairman Nesbitt has the right idea – full regulation will encourage investment in Michigan's energy future while ensuring reliable and affordable power for all.

I urge the committee to protect our state's families and businesses – pass a Michigan-first policy that will secure our energy future.

Thank you.