

**Statement of Senator Susan M. Collins**  
**Support for Energy Package**  
**March 3, 2020**

Thank you, Mr. President, Mr. President. I rise today in support of the *American Energy Innovation Act*, a compilation of energy related measures reported by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee with bipartisan support.

Let me start by recognizing the tremendous efforts of the very committed and dedicated Chairman of that committee, Lisa Murkowski, and the Ranking Member, Joe Manchin, for their work in bringing this comprehensive energy package to the Senate floor. Under their leadership, the committee has worked very hard to craft a bipartisan package that seeks to lower energy costs for consumers, diversify our energy portfolio and facilitate and encourage the use of cleaner energy sources.

Mr. President, the *American Energy Innovation Act* includes several bills that I authored or cosponsored including the *Better Energy Storage Technology Act*, known as the BEST Act, that supports energy storage, research, and development, the *Weatherization Enhancement in Local Energy Efficiency Investment and Accountability Act* that reauthorizes the weatherization assistance programs, the *Wind Energy Research and Development Act* that supports targeted investments in wind energy, and the *Energy Savings and Industrial Competitiveness Act*, as well as the *Streamlining Energy Efficiency for Schools Act* that both promote energy efficiency.

Mr. President, I'm particularly pleased that this agreement includes legislation that I authored with Senator Heinrich, what is known as the BEST Act—the Better Energy Storage Technology.

This bipartisan bill will support energy storage, research, and development, which will in turn advance the deployment of renewable energy. Federal investments in the research, development, and deployment of energy storage technologies will enable the expansion of renewable energy sources that are essential to combat climate change. Energy storage systems actually provide a wide range of benefits. First, these technologies increase the reliability and resiliency of our electric grid by limiting potential disruptions. Energy storage allows for better management of supply and demand for our nation's power grid. Second, this type of technology can decrease energy costs. In the State of Maine, the price of energy and electricity can rise steeply during the coldest days of the year.

In late 2017 and early 2018, very cold temperatures in New England led to higher energy costs that amounted to more than \$1 billion spent in the wholesale energy market in only 15 days. The next generation of energy storage technologies could also help transform our grid, meaning that we would no longer need to generate more expensive power to meet demand during the hottest and coldest days of the year. Instead, we could use more affordable sources of energy that have been stored for later use.

Finally, Mr. President, energy storage systems can allow for more intermittent renewable sources such as wind or solar power to be placed on the grid and used precisely when they are needed. Think of that, Mr. President, right now, if the wind isn't blowing, obviously we're not producing wind energy. If the sun is not shining, we are not producing solar generated energy. But if during those windy periods and those sunny days we could figure out how to store the energy that is produced to be released later for electricity on the grid, what a difference it would make.

Off the coast of Maine, offshore wind turbines can produce electricity almost 50 percent of the time due to our relatively persistent offshore winds. But with next generation energy storage technology, we could utilize this wind power closer to 100 percent of the time by storing the electricity produced to use when the wind isn't blowing. That is why I am so excited about the potential for improving our energy storage technologies. We all think of batteries, and certainly, coming up with better and more efficient batteries to store electricity is part of the answer. But there are other technologies that are going to be available if we make a concerted effort to devote resources to research and development and deployment. So for these reasons, Mr. President, I am especially delighted that the BEST Act was included in this package and I hope that it will be enacted swiftly.

Next, I would like to turn to a program that is so important to many low-income families and seniors in the State of Maine, and that is the Weatherization Assistance Program. I would like to thank Senators Murkowski and Manchin for including a bill that I authored with Senators Coons, Reed, and Shaheen to reauthorize the Weatherization Assistance Program. Through my position on the Appropriations Committee, I've worked with my colleagues to secure an increase of \$51 million for weatherization assistance for fiscal year 2020.

In fact, virtually every year, this is something that the Senators that I have mentioned and I have worked together to achieve. Oftentimes, regrettably, the President's budget eliminates the funding for the Weatherization Assistance Program. But with bipartisan support, the members of the Appropriations Committee work hard to include it in the funding bill. And one reason we do so is because weatherizing our houses, whether it's insulating them or replacing windows or installing heat pumps, pays off. In fact, weatherization on average returns a 4 to 1 on the investment.

Since 2010, the State of Maine has received a little more than \$22 million in funding and has been able to weatherize successfully nearly 2,500 homes and rental units across the state. And what a difference that has made to the families living in those homes, to the seniors who once were living in drafty homes where their energy costs were much higher than they needed to be because their homes were not well insulated. It also makes those homes a lot more comfortable for our seniors and other low-income families.

Encouraging the adoption of energy efficiency measures is one of the easiest yet most effective mechanisms for reducing energy consumption, lessening pollution, and ultimately saving money for families, businesses, communities, and governments at all levels.

In addition to weatherization, this comprehensive package supports crucial investments in renewable energy, including the Wind Energy Research and Development Act that I introduced with Senator Smith. This bill would reauthorize the Department of Energy's Office of Wind Energy. It would support grants to improve efficiency, reliability, and capacity of wind energy generation. The Aqua Ventus program, which aims to be the first floating, deepwater offshore wind project in the United States, has been under development by the University of Maine and a consortium of both public and private partners for many years now, and that consortium and the University of Maine in particular could benefit from these targeted investments in offshore wind energy.

Finally, another important component of this comprehensive bill is energy efficiency. I am pleased that the Energy Savings and Industrial Competitiveness Act is included in this package. As an original cosponsor of this bill, which is also known as the Portman-Shaheen energy efficiency legislation, I recognize that it can kick-start the use of energy efficiency technologies that are commercially available right now and can be deployed by residential, commercial, and industrial energy users. It will also improve the energy efficiency of the federal government, which happens to be our nation's largest consumer of energy. I would like to congratulate the bill sponsors, Senators Shaheen and Portman, for crafting this commonsense bill and for their relentless efforts to get it across the finish line. And again, I want to express my appreciation to Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Manchin.

I would also like to highlight another energy efficiency bill included in this package, and that is the Streamlining Energy Efficiency for Schools Act that I sponsored with Senator Mark Warner. In Maine, our schools have made tremendous progress on energy efficiency, but it can be challenging for schools to take full advantage of programs that lower energy costs, in part because school officials may not know where to start.

A lot of these programs are scattered in different agencies across the federal government. Our bipartisan bill would create a coordinating structure within the Department of Energy that would streamline available federal energy efficiency programs, assist school administrators with navigating available federal financing, and thus reduce school buildings' energy costs.

Again, I want to thank the committee leaders for their excellent work on this package of energy legislation, and I would urge all of my colleagues to join me in supporting adoption of the American Energy Innovation Act. Mr. President, this is an area where we can truly make a difference for our constituents, our communities, our states, our levels of government, and for our country. Let's get on with the adoption of this very worthwhile package of energy bills.