

Brown Urges Partnership in Cyber Security Debate

WASHINGTON—A strong federal-State and public-private partnership is essential to ensuring the continued reliability and security of the transmission grid in the face of cyber concerns, the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners told Congress.

In Oct. 27 testimony before the House Energy and Commerce Committee Subcommittee on Energy and the Environment, NARUC Electricity Committee Chairman Garry Brown of New York said cyber-security concerns are a new paradigm for the utility industry in general, but the industry, with proper regulatory oversight, will respond.

"Cyber security is an emerging area of risk for our utilities and State commissions as well, and although it is unique in some respects, this is not the first time our utility systems have faced new reliability threats," Chairman Brown said. "Through a strong public-private partnership, we have overcome past risks, and it is my belief that overall, [the] merging of information systems into the electric and other utility sectors improves their resilience, reliability, and efficiency."

State commissions are actively engaged in this area, Brown said, noting that protection of Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) systems have long been a focus of industry and regulators alike. In recent years, vulnerabilities to SCADA systems have been highlighted, but are well managed.

But as communications networks become more intertwined with electrical systems through Smart-Grid projects, State commissions are turning their attention to these issues as well. With utilities seeking cost recovery of new technologies and Smart-Grid deployment, State commissions want to make sure that these investments are as secure and prudent as possible, Chairman Brown said.

"In concept, the smart grid has the potential to provide many improvements in situational awareness, prevention, management, and restoration," Chairman Brown said. "In spite of introducing new vulnerabilities, smart grid fundamentally makes the electric system more secure. Still, this technology brings with it new vulnerabilities and points-of-access to create intentional disruption, which should be taken extremely seriously."

Focusing on legislative solutions, Chairman Brown recommended that Congress must ensure strong communication between federal and State authorities, and the utility industry. "Any legislation in this area should focus on the ability for federal agencies with information identifying priority vulnerabilities and imminent threats to communicate with the various electricity providers, State and federal law enforcement entities, and State regulatory authorities," he said.

* * * * *

NARUC is a non-profit organization founded in 1889 whose members include the governmental agencies that are engaged in the regulation of utilities and carriers in the fifty States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. NARUC's member agencies regulate telecommunications, energy, and water utilities. NARUC

represents the interests of State public utility commissions before the three branches of the Federal government.

##