

Statement of Karen Feridun

Minimizing Risk & Harm: Preparing for Pennsylvania's Hydrogen Future

PA Senate Democratic Policy Committee Hearing

December 4, 2023

Good afternoon, Chairman Muth, Senator Comitta, and committee members. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak about hydrogen hubs proposed for Pennsylvania.

My name is Karen Feridun. I am one of the co-founders of the Better Path Coalition. I began convening a false solutions group in 2020 when Governor Wolf announced his participation in a regional CO₂ transport initiative led by the Great Plains Institute. I represent our coalition on a national CO₂ Plenary and chair its messaging subcommittee. I also represent the coalition on a national CCS-Strategy team and chair its Hydrogen Working Group.

When Department of Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm appeared with President Biden in Philadelphia in October for the hydrogen hub announcement, she said, "With today's announcement, we're jumpstarting a new clean hydrogen economy here in the U.S."ⁱ That's quite a statement. It's not the first time she's made it. Since June of 2021 when she first announced an initiative to bring down the price of hydrogen, she has frequently referred to a blossoming hydrogen economy, yet in that span of more than two years, the public has been given little information about this tectonic economic shift and no voice in deciding if it is the right way forward.

In the weeks after the announcement, DOE held a series of regional hub meetings for the public. The sessions were not recorded. Chat was disabled. Roughly 400 questions submitted during the Pennsylvania hub sessions went unanswered.

The fossil fuel industry has taken advantage of the lack of information and transparency to promote Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS), the technology that presumably turns gray hydrogen blue. According to a new report, Corporate Advocacy for Carbon Capture and Storage, from Influence Map, "the research identifies three common claims that appear across corporate advocacy on CCS: that CCS allows for continued oil and gas expansion; that CCS is central to meeting global climate targets; and that CCS can support jobs and communities. These claims appear to misrepresent Science-Based Policy guidance to varying degrees. Together, they have been pushed by the fossil fuel sector at international and regional levels with the ultimate impact of capturing the global narrative on the role of CCS, misdirecting policy attention away from fossil fuel phase-out, and enabling policy and investment decisions based on 'business-as-usual' assumptions for the oil and gas sector." The authors call the promotion of CCS indiscriminate.ⁱⁱ

In her speech in Philadelphia in October, Secretary Granholm painted hydrogen with a similarly broad brush when she said, "Clean hydrogen is the 'Swiss Army Knife' of zero-carbon solutions because it can do just about everything."ⁱⁱⁱ

It can't. And it's dishonest to suggest otherwise.

A tweet I ran across in 2022 sums up the problem underlying the government's hydrogen ambitions, "You can't fossil fuel your way out of a fossil fuel created crisis."^{iv}

According to reporting from Canary Media, five of the seven announced hubs "plan significant investments in blue hydrogen." Research the article cites from the Energy Futures Initiative found that while 70 percent of the recently announced clean hydrogen projects are green, they are mostly small projects. The much larger blue hydrogen proposals only account for 20 percent of the projects, but 95 percent of the total production capacity.^v

Perry Babb, an entrepreneur whose shape-shifting business plan is currently aligned with the ARCH2 hub, told the Associated Press that he believes blue hydrogen will "build the house that green hydrogen can occupy when it becomes as cost effective."^{vi}

Contrary to what Secretary Granholm would have us believe, green hydrogen is likely the only form of hydrogen that could be worth pursuing in hopes that it might have some very limited application at some point in the future. For now, its only role is that of the carrot dangled in front of those who are worried about our continued reliance on fossil fuels to tempt them into believing that blue hydrogen is a temporary bridge to a clean hydrogen future.

The reality is that blue hydrogen, if it comes, is here to stay. I call it bait and never switch. And because the CCS upon which blue hydrogen relies is an unproven, some even call it a disproven, technology, blue hydrogen is nothing more than really expensive, super-emitting dirty gray hydrogen.

The fossil fuel industry has worked through its playbook's chapters on denial, debate, and delay and is now working from the chapters on dissembling and distraction, but they don't believe they are anywhere near the last chapter. It is the government's job to shut the book for good, not quote from it. We would do best to reject hydrogen and CCS for the false climate solutions they are and put all of our efforts into deploying the real, proven, scalable renewable energy solutions we so desperately need to keep humankind's book from closing.

Thank you.

ⁱ Remarks as Prepared for Delivery by Secretary Jennifer Granholm at President Biden's Unveiling of America's First Clean Hydrogen Hubs, DOE, October 13, 2023, <https://www.energy.gov/articles/remarks-prepared-delivery-secretary-jennifer-granholm-president-bidens-unveiling-americas>

ⁱⁱ InfluenceMap, *Corporate Advocacy on Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS): How the Oil and Gas Sector is Influencing the Global Agenda on CCS and Fossil Fuel Phase-out*, December 2023, <https://influencemap.org/report/CCS-and-Corporate-Policy-Engagement-24754>

ⁱⁱⁱ Remarks as Prepared for Delivery by Secretary Jennifer Granholm at President Biden's Unveiling of America's First Clean Hydrogen Hubs, DOE, October 13, 2023, <https://www.energy.gov/articles/remarks-prepared-delivery-secretary-jennifer-granholm-president-bidens-unveiling-americas>

^{iv} Tweet from Dr. Elizabeth Sawin, August 12, 2022,

https://twitter.com/bethsawin/status/1558107420378947585?s=20&t=v4gAt7DHFslJOmli9_dohg

^v Jeff St. John, "The case against the US government's big 'blue hydrogen' bet," *Canary Media*, October 18, 2023,

<https://www.canarymedia.com/articles/hydrogen/the-case-against-the-us-governments-big-blue-hydrogen-bet>

^{vi} Laura Legere & Anya Litvak, "Hydrogen, carbon storage project tapping into all the trends," *Associated Press*,

August 21, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/technology-business-science-2935528db16e4b12e79eaff867373dec>