Senator Cory Gardner, Chairman
Opening Statement

Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy
Hearing to "examine the cybersecurity threats to the U.S. electric grid and technology advancements to minimize such threats and to receive testimony on S. 79, the Securing Energy Infrastructure Act"

March 28, 2017

The Subcommittee will come to order.

Good afternoon, everyone. Today the Subcommittee on Energy will hold its first hearing in the 115th Congress.

I'm honored to chair this Subcommittee and I look forward to working with the Subcommittee's Ranking Member – Senator Manchin.

The Energy Subcommittee is certainly important to my home state of Colorado.

In Colorado, we have coal in the Northwestern part of the state, oil on the Western Slope, natural gas and wind on the Eastern Plains, and solar in the San Luis Valley.

We are truly an all of the above energy state and proud of that fact. We are also home to the Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory, which is instrumental in research and development for new technologies advancing grid modernization, renewable energy, and energy efficiency that will transform the marketplace.

As Chairman, I will promote a strong and responsible energy policy that is critical to unleashing the nation's energy potential, and I look forward to using this Subcommittee to advance policies that benefit Coloradans and all Americans.

Today, the Subcommittee will examine the cybersecurity threats to the U.S. electric grid and technology advancements to minimize such threats and receive testimony on S. 79, the Securing Energy Infrastructure Act.

We will discuss the risks we face and the actions we should follow to protect our energy infrastructure from the impacts of cyberattacks.

In addition to defensive strategies, I am also interested in discussing whether there is a need to build preparedness and response capabilities in case of a long-term widespread outage.

The American people and American businesses depend on reliable and affordable electricity. These same customers expect the over 3,000 utilities in the country to be thinking ahead, coordinating actions, and being responsive to our evolving demands.

If we aren't prepared for cyberattacks, a Ukraine-like situation could take place in the United States.

In 2015, an attack on power companies in Ukraine resulted in 225,000 Ukrainians losing power. Last December, there was another attack in Ukraine that resulted in another round of power outages, but the strategy on the Ukrainian grid was more complex than the year before.

And hackers are certainly trying to create that havoc here in the United States. One U.S. utility CEO has said that, "If I were to share with you the number of attacks that come into the network every day, you would be astounded. And it's not from people working out of their garage; it's from nation-states that are trying to penetrate systems."

I am encouraged to see that industry, through the Electricity Sector Coordinating Council, is working to collaborate and create best practices in partnership with the government. The government and industry have also made great strides in cybersecurity through the creation of the National Institute of Standards and Technology or NIST Cybersecurity Framework and the Electricity Information Sharing and Analysis Center (E-ISAC).

It is concerning, however, that we continue to hear of attacks from so many fronts.

Hackers are going after personal information and personal accounts that can be disastrous and financially painful to those affected. We hear of ransomware attacks requiring payment to resume access to machines and controls. We hear of millions of dollars being spent across industry and government to protect from these ever-changing threats to our national progress.

The questions that loom; however, are how, when, where is that next cyberattack going to happen? Are we prepared to react?

I am hopeful that through this hearing and opportunities in the coming months that we can strengthen both our preparedness and our response capabilities.

I already see opportunities to enhance our cyber workforce and the need to gain clarity on the coordinated response actions of the Department of Energy Secretary and industry leaders.

I am hopeful that we will uncover additional opportunities today.

I will now turn to Ranking Member Manchin for his introductory remarks.