

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 6, 2013

Mr. Frederick Gorbet
Chairman of the Board of Trustees
North American Electric Reliability Corporation
8 Brighton Place, Unit #57
Thornhill, Ontario L4J 0E3

Mr. Gerry W. Cauley
President and Chief Executive Officer
North American Electric Reliability Corporation
3353 Peachtree Road, N.E., Suite 600, North Tower
Atlanta, Georgia 30326

Dear Messrs. Gorbet and Cauley:

As you know, on October 27, 2013, National Geographic aired a feature film entitled, "American Blackout." It showed what our countrymen and nation would experience in the event of a cyber attack on the U.S. bulk power distribution system that shut down the grid for ten days. If anything, the serious hardships, dislocation, physical destruction, deaths and societal breakdown portrayed in this docudrama are likely *understated*.

Yet, one of your member electric utilities, Kissimmee Utility Authority, saw fit to issue a press release after "American Blackout" was broadcast that downplayed the dangers associated with the sort of disruption portrayed in the film. It was headlined, "No Need for Panic."

We note that the industry has often issued such casual assurances when confronted with evidence – including that contained in no fewer than five different federal government studies in recent years – that a sustained blackout would be catastrophic. Rather than address this conclusion forthrightly and ensure that corrective actions are taken to prevent such an event, or at least minimize its likelihood, NERC and many of the utilities it represents have historically tried to deflect attention and trivialize the threat.

Such behavior is all the more astounding given that we *know* the grid could be disrupted possibly for a period of time far beyond that depicted in the American Blackout docudrama as a result not only of cyber warfare, but also due to man-induced physical destruction through tactical attacks using radio frequency weapons or brute force techniques. There are also the far more grave scenarios, such as a State or Non-State actor's use of a nuclear weapon detonated high above the United States to generate high-altitude electromagnetic pulses (EMP) or the *growing* probability that our planet will be exposed at some point in the future to significant naturally occurring geomagnetic disturbances (GMD). A severe version of either of these latter possibilities represents a catastrophic threat to the United States of widespread power loss for potentially months or years that could result in American society tearing itself apart and a horrific loss of human life.

In light of these dangers, we want to establish whether you and the North American Electric Reliability Corporation share the view of the utility in Kissimmee? Or do you believe the public *should be* concerned that the grid may be offline for extended periods?

This question is of more than academic interest to those of us in the Congress in light of the upcoming exercise, GridEx II, that NERC and electric utilities across the country will conduct next week. Presumably, this drill is meant to provide meaningful, objective, and useable evidence to map the grid's vulnerabilities and lay out what needs to be done to eliminate them wherever possible.

If, however, NERC and others involved in planning and executing GridEx II are dismissive of those who believe such vulnerabilities exist – and if the planners are intent on using the exercise to *hide*, rather than expose, these shortcomings – GridEx may actually be a grave disservice to the consumer, to the public more generally and perhaps to America's vital national security.

We would appreciate an expeditious response to this letter that clarifies your organization's stance on these matters and that of the industry you represent. It would be particularly helpful if the requested response were provided *before* GridEx II gets underway, in order to permit, if necessary, adjustments in the planning scenario and conduct of the exercise so as to ensure the exercise's realism and maximize its usefulness.

Sincerely,



Trent Franks (AZ08)
Member of Congress

cc: Chair of the NERC Planning Committee
Chair of the NERC Operating Committee
Chair of the NERC Members Representative Committee
Chair of the NERC Electricity Sub-Sector Coordinating Council
Chair of the NERC Critical Infrastructure Protection Committee