

NEWS RELEASE

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STATEMENT OF IBEW PRESIDENT EDWIN D. HILL

ON THE REPORT OF THE

U.S.-CANADIAN POWER SYSTEMS OUTAGE TASK FORCE

The IBEW has been warning for years that modern society would pay a high price for utility deregulation. On August 14, 2003, the bill came due.

Fifty million people in the Northeast, Midwest and Canada were plunged into darkness in what some experts call the biggest engineering failure in United States history.

The U.S.-Canadian Power Systems Outage Task Force report intentionally does not include any reference to deregulation and for that reason it is seriously flawed. In a rush for profit, many utilities have abandoned their once-strong commitment to the reliable delivery of electricity. Maintaining a stable, dependable system has taken a back seat to open markets.

Our electricity infrastructure is a patchwork of interconnected systems that can be devastatingly vulnerable to weakness. A failure in one section of the system can trip lines across huge portions of the country in seconds. Deregulation requires utilities to push power across lines in ways they were never engineered to be used.

That day in August, a tortured grid bit back.

Employment in the utility industry has fallen more than 21 percent since 1990. New construction has slowed, existing lines have become heavily loaded, and maintenance and infrastructure investment have declined precipitously. We are concerned that utility companies are not making the necessary investment in workforce training, let alone keeping up critical facilities.

Deregulation's apologists will never be able to defy sound engineering principles with economic theories. Government officials and regulators must now recognize that politically driven policies cannot trump the laws of physics.

We view this as an opportunity to institute a comprehensive, engineering-based study of the electric grid and assure adequate investment in critical electric supply facilities.

The IBEW represents 220,000 utility workers in the United States and Canada.

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