

August 15, 2003

Hon. Pat Wood, Chairman
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
888 First Street, NE
Washington, DC 20426

Dear Chairman Wood,

I am writing to request that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) immediately begin an investigation into the unprecedented August 14, 2003, electricity blackout in the Northeast United States. It is essential that we understand not only the origin of the event, but also the apparent failure of our current electric reliability systems and protocols to limit the spread of the disruption so that corrective measures can be taken. It is my expectation that FERC will use its full investigative and regulatory authority under the Federal Power Act to conduct this investigation and that you will make this one of the agency's highest priorities.

The events of the past twenty four hours underscore not only the nation's extraordinary dependence on the reliable supply of electricity, but also highlight its vulnerability to disruptions of that supply. As discussed during the Governmental Affairs Committee's June 28, 2001 hearing – "The Impact of Electric Industry Restructuring on System Reliability," deregulation of the electric industry and the expanded use of market-based transactions on the electric grid have only added to the burden placed on the electric transmission system and its operators and will continue to do so. Even before September 11, 2001, it was also clear that we need to be concerned with potential disruption of our electric system due to terrorism. Consequently, it is imperative that in addition to examining the cause of the current crisis and identifying corrective actions, FERC should also examine the larger question of what other organizational and structural changes are needed to ensure a reliable supply of electricity in the future.

In light of the extraordinary impacts that the blackout has caused throughout the Northeastern United States, I am sure that you share my concern that we find the cause of this crisis as quickly as possible and develop a comprehensive response. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Joseph I. Lieberman
Ranking Member

cc: Honorable Susan Collins

