

JULIA LETLOW, Ph.D.
5TH DISTRICT, LOUISIANA

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
RURAL DEVELOPMENT,
FOOD & DRUG ADMINISTRATION,
AND RELATED AGENCIES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LABOR, HEALTH
AND HUMAN SERVICES, EDUCATION AND
RELATED AGENCIES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY,
DEPARTMENT OF STATE, AND RELATED
PROGRAMS

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
AND WORKFORCE

letlow.house.gov

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1805

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
142 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
TEL: (202) 225-8490
FAX: (202) 225-5639

DISTRICT OFFICES:
LOUISIANA CAPITAL REGION OFFICE
7932 WRENWOOD BLVD., SUITE C
BATON ROUGE, LA 70801
TEL: (225) 952-1390

NORTHEAST LOUISIANA OFFICE
1900 NORTH 18TH STREET, SUITE 501
MONROE, LA 71201
TEL: (318) 670-6440

SOUTH LOUISIANA OFFICE
1514 MARTENS DRIVE, SUITE 3
HAMMOND, LA 70401
TEL: (985) 284-5200

February 6, 2026

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Chris Wright
Secretary of Energy
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Secretary Rollins and Secretary Wright:

I write to encourage the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Energy to prioritize grid reliability and resilience initiatives that support the strategic undergrounding of electric distribution infrastructure in disaster-prone regions, including through programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service (RUS).

Communities in Louisiana regularly experience severe weather that exposes vulnerabilities in above-ground power systems. In the immediate aftermath of Winter Storm Fern, roughly 100,000 residents across Central and North Louisiana were left without power, including residents in Monroe and nearby rural communities served by electric cooperatives.

These prolonged outages disrupted homes, agricultural operations, small businesses, schools, and essential services that rural economies depend on. I have also heard directly from constituents who lost refrigerated and frozen food as a result of extended power outages, highlighting the real financial strain unreliable service places on families. Reliable and affordable electricity is not a luxury for working families. It is a basic expectation, and these repeated disruptions demonstrate the importance of practical, forward-looking infrastructure planning across both energy and rural development priorities.

While federal programs under the Biden administration promoted large-scale undergrounding of power lines, the experience in many communities demonstrates that these outcomes have not materialized as anticipated. This underscores the need for practical implementation, accountability, and targeted deployment that delivers measurable resilience improvements.

While undergrounding is not appropriate or cost-effective in every setting, targeted deployment in high-risk areas can reduce long-term restoration costs, improve service reliability, and limit the financial and personal burden placed on consumers after major storms.

As your Departments administer resilience, rural infrastructure, and grid modernization programs, I encourage policies, financing tools, and technical guidance that empower states, utilities, and rural electric cooperatives to evaluate underground solutions where fiscally responsible and operationally justified, while ensuring ratepayers are protected from unnecessary cost increases. Particular attention to opportunities within USDA's Rural Utilities Service to support grid hardening and resiliency investments could provide meaningful benefits to rural communities that face elevated outage risks.

My office would welcome engagement with your staff to better understand how current Department programs support grid hardening efforts, including undergrounding, and to identify any barriers Congress could address to promote more timely reliability, affordability, and consumer protection in vulnerable regions.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your work to strengthen the nation's energy infrastructure. If I can answer any questions regarding this topic, or otherwise be of help, please contact Kade Smith in my office at Kade.Smith@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julia Letlow". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julia Letlow, Ph.D.
MEMBER OF CONGRESS