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News, Research and Events

February 24, 2021



Photo by Ron Jenkins / Getty Images

The Texas blackout: Fail to prepare? Prepare to fail

More than three million people lost power in Texas last week and, as many of you know firsthand, the outages lasted days. What happened, and what can be done to prevent a repeat of this catastrophic failure?

[Jim Krane](#), the Wallace S. Wilson Fellow for Energy Studies, and [Robert Idel](#) and [Peter Volkmar](#) — graduate fellows at the [Center for Energy Studies](#) — coauthored a blog to answer these questions.

The collapse of Texas' energy grid came down to lax regulations that discourage energy providers from paying to winterize their infrastructure, the authors wrote. In a state that rarely sees below-freezing temperatures, remedies to ensure that power plants are winter-ready are not mandated and have become routinely ignored. Because of this, energy companies were unprepared to deal with the extended cold snap that hit Texas last week. Each of the four main power generation technologies — natural gas, wind, nuclear and coal — failed, leaving the electricity supply nowhere near ready to meet the huge spike in demand. This left millions of Texans with only one recourse — a pile of warm blankets.

Going forward, "the best starting place is to winterize natural gas plants since that's where we get most of our electricity," said Krane in an interview this week. "We also need more regulatory oversight so that the power grid is treated like the critical infrastructure it is, rather than a vehicle for profits. That means clear rules and penalties for breaking them. Generators that promise to supply power and cannot — for whatever reason — should be penalized."

The full blog post, originally published at [Forbes](#), is also available on the [Baker Institute Blog](#).

"You might say, 'We lost a week [of COVID-19 vaccinations]. What's the big deal?' But my worry is the stakes are high because of new variants now permeating the U.S."

Peter Hotez, Fellow in Disease and Poverty, to [KHOU-11](#)



Webinar: A boost in North American trade prospects?

The U.S.-China trade war is almost certain to result in a decoupling of the U.S. and Chinese economies in the next few years. This could lead to a major boost to economic cooperation in North America under the USMCA trade deal, the successor to NAFTA, say experts at the Center for the United States and Mexico. North American businesses could be more competitive with those in Europe and Asia — but only if the three USMCA parties (the U.S., Mexico and Canada) work together.

Join us for a webinar on Wednesday, Feb. 24, as international trade experts discuss how the USMCA and U.S.-China trade war could impact governments, businesses and consumers. [Visit our events page to register](#) or to learn more.

Upcoming Events

Roundtable Dialogue: China's energy supply and demand in the 2020s.

At this [member-exclusive](#) event, [Gabriel Collins](#), Baker Botts Fellow in Energy & Environmental Regulatory Affairs, gives a strategic overview of key trends that are shaping or are poised to shape China's energy strategy in this decade. **February 26 | 12 noon**

Webinar — Managing Transitions: The Future of National Oil Companies in Latin America

At this event, experts discussed the future of NOCs in the region and the strategies and policies required to manage them in challenging times.

[Watch a video of the full event here.](#) **February 23 | 9:00 am**

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