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ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

### COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927

Minority (202) 225-3641

October 14, 2021

The Honorable Jennifer Granholm  
Secretary of Energy  
U.S. Department of Energy  
1000 Independence Ave., Southwest  
Washington, D.C. 20585

Dear Secretary Granholm:

With winter right around the corner, we have serious concerns about rapidly rising energy prices and the negative impact these price increases are having on the U.S. economy, inflation, and household bills. The Department of Energy (DOE) is tasked with promoting the interests of Americans through the provision of an adequate and reliable supply of energy at the lowest reasonable cost. With predictions of a colder than usual winter this year, we want to understand as soon as possible what actions you and the Department are taking to prepare for what could be a perfect storm of a cold winter, high and unaffordable energy prices, and supply disruptions.

Since President Biden took office, the prices of crude oil and many energy commodities have risen to seven-year highs. Retail gasoline prices have increased 80 percent, natural gas prices have increased 274 percent, and propane prices have increased 552 percent over the past year-and-a-half.<sup>1</sup> The energy crisis gripping the nation threatens to reverse the progress made under the prior Administration to allow the U.S. to become energy secure. As you know, the U.S. was a net energy exporter in 2019 for the first time since 1952; however, since March our reliance on foreign crude oil imports has skyrocketed.

As Secretary of Energy, your primary responsibility is strengthening and protecting the nation's energy security. Millions of Americans depend on reliable and affordable supplies of these fossil-based fuels for home heating, electricity, transportation, manufacturing, and agriculture. Additionally, as you know, energy price increases are also passed along in many goods and services, stretching family and household budgets, and exacerbating energy poverty.

While we understand that global supply chain disruptions and demand shocks related to the COVID-19 pandemic have influenced domestic prices, we are deeply concerned that the

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<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Energy Information Administration reports the weekly average price of regular gasoline has increased from \$1.77 per gallon on April 27, 2020 to \$3.19 per gallon on October 4, 2021; the price of natural gas has increased from \$1.52 per million Btu on June 19, 2020 to \$5.68 per million Btu on October 1, 2021; and, the price of propane has increased from \$0.23 per gallon on March 27, 2020 to \$1.50 per gallon on October 5, 2021.

Administration's anti-fossil fuel agenda is significantly contributing to higher bills for American families and businesses. On his first day in office, President Biden revoked the permit for the Keystone XL pipeline and imposed a moratorium on fossil energy development on Federal lands and waters. In recent comments, you indicated that DOE could respond to high gasoline prices by releasing emergency oil reserves from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) or reinstate the ban on crude oil exports that Congress repealed on a bipartisan basis in 2015. These actions and statements, combined with the Administration's goals to increase further environmental regulations and mandate economy-wide net-zero greenhouse gas emissions, have a chilling effect on domestic energy infrastructure investments and supplies.

The pace and trajectory of domestic energy price increases presents serious threats to the health, safety, and welfare of Americans and requires urgent attention. Pursuant to the Department of Energy Organization Act (P.L. 95-91), the Secretary of Energy is required to implement a coordinated national energy policy to address short-, mid- and long-term energy problems. The Secretary is also responsible for the gathering, analysis, and dissemination of energy information to inform policies that could affect energy supply and prices.

In light of your responsibilities, and to assist with our own assessment of the emerging impacts of higher energy prices, we ask that you respond to the following by October 21, 2021:

- 1) Please describe what specific actions DOE is currently taking, or planning to take in the immediate future, to address energy prices and supply shortages ahead of the upcoming winter.
  - a. While the Administration has called on the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and Russia to boost oil production, what steps is DOE taking to increase U.S. oil production?
  - b. In recent comments, you indicated DOE was considering a release from the SPR or imposing a ban on crude oil exports to respond to rising energy prices. Under current law, only the President may authorize these actions in an emergency.<sup>2</sup> Please describe the legal authorities and policy justification supporting DOE's consideration of an SPR release and a crude oil export ban.
- 2) Please provide DOE's current analysis and projections for residential and commercial electricity and fuel prices for the upcoming winter months.
- 3) Please provide an assessment of recent Executive Actions, Federal policies, and any regulations that may be causing or contributing to energy price increases.
- 4) Please provide to the Committee monthly updates forecasting, in six- and twelve-month increments, the best available information on residential energy price trends, rate impacts on low-income households, and DOE actions to mitigate energy price increases. Include in your forecasts:

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<sup>2</sup> The Energy Policy and Conservation Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-163) restricts the drawdown and sale of petroleum products from the SPR unless the President makes an emergency declaration and determines that a severe energy supply interruption exists. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2016 (P.L. 114-113) prohibits any official of the Federal Government from imposing a ban on the export of crude oil unless the President declares a national emergency and formally notices the declaration in the Federal Register.

- a. Projections using currently enacted policies as a reference case;
- b. Impacts on reference case projections by proposed Federal and legislative policies, including international climate commitments submitted by the U.S.; and
- c. Actions you are taking to identify and address energy supply and other economic and regulatory factors affecting the price trends.

You may have your staff work with Mary Martin or Brandon Mooney of the Republican Committee staff on the details of this request. We appreciate your prompt attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



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Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
Republican Leader  
Committee on Energy and Commerce



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Fred Upton  
Republican Leader  
Subcommittee on Energy



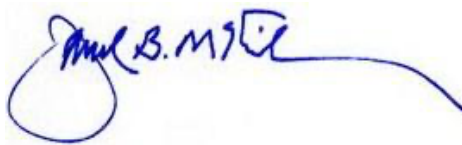
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Robert E. Latta  
Republican Leader  
Subcommittee on Communications and  
Technology



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Brett Guthrie  
Republican Leader  
Subcommittee on Health



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David B. McKinley  
Republican Leader  
Subcommittee on Environment and  
Climate Change



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H. Morgan Griffith  
Republican Leader  
Subcommittee on Oversight and  
Investigations



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Gus M. Bilirakis  
Republican Leader  
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection  
and Commerce



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Michael C. Burgess, M.D.  
Member of Congress



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Steve Scalise  
Member of Congress



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Adam Kinzinger  
Member of Congress



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Bill Johnson  
Member of Congress



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Billy Long  
Member of Congress



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Larry Bucshon, M.D.  
Member of Congress



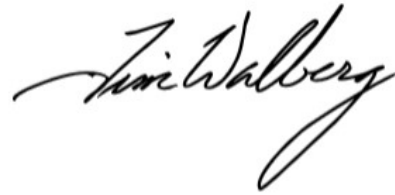
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Markwayne Mullin  
Member of Congress



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Richard Hudson  
Member of Congress



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Tim Walberg  
Member of Congress



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Earl L. "Buddy" Carter  
Member of Congress



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Jeff Duncan  
Member of Congress



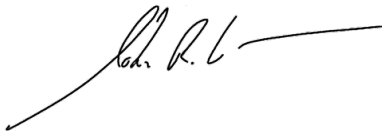
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