

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 28, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

We write today to urge federal action to address the heating needs of our country's households as we approach and enter the upcoming winter season. Given the current state of energy markets and the lingering economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic – and in preparation for the cold weather season in New England – we urge your administration to consider and prepare to take targeted actions. These actions include releasing inventory from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and the Northeast Home Heating Oil Reserve and limiting natural gas exports to lessen the effect of potential residential energy price increases on New Englanders' household finances.

Over the course of the pandemic, Congress has acted to provide support to families and households for their residential heating needs through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. Those resources must be sustained and many senators, from both sides of the aisle, support that effort.

The most recent Winter Fuels Outlook, published by the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), predicts “higher residential energy bills this winter,” and that those predicted costs will have an outsized impact on households that heat with natural gas, propane, and heating oil, a considerable number of whom are our constituents.

The EIA Outlook notes that “retail prices for energy are at or near multi-year highs in the United States” and that it is “expect[ed] that households across the United States will spend more on energy this winter compared with the past several winters.” As noted in the EIA Outlook, households that heat primarily with propane will potentially spend 54 percent more on their residential energy bills, and up to 94 percent more in a colder winter, which EIA predicts is likely. Those households that heat primarily with heating oil will potentially spend 43 percent more this winter on their energy bills, and up to 59 percent more in a colder winter. Households that rely on natural gas will potentially spend 30 percent more on their energy bills, or around 50 percent more in a colder winter.

These predicted costs will have a very real effect on the ability of many New England families to keep their homes at a safe temperature this winter. No family should have to make the decision between paying their bill to keep their children warm, putting food on the table, and keeping the lights on. Given the significant energy bill increase that many New England families are facing, we respectfully urge the administration to take all appropriate measures to mitigate those costs, so that families can be safe in heated homes during this winter season.

Given the lower inventories of crude oil, propane, and natural gas, the lower levels of production, and the continued complications in the supply chain, there is an undersupply that could result in significant price shocks and supply disruptions. Coupled with the dramatic increases in energy costs in much of Europe and Asia, the Northeastern United States could be placed in the position of a sharp rise in residential energy costs. Given that possibility, we urge the administration to closely monitor the energy needs of the Northeast and to consider limiting natural gas exports and utilizing stock from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and the Northeast Home Heating Oil Reserve, consistent with the discretion granted to the President under, respectively, 15 U.S.C § 717b, 42 U.S.C. § 6241, and 42 U.S.C. § 6250b, to directly and significantly reduce the adverse impact of a significant regional shortage of natural gas, propane, and home heating oil.

We appreciate your leadership and attention to this important matter during an unprecedented time in the history of public health, and we know that you share our concerns about this critical economic and public health matter facing millions of Americans in New England and across the country. It is in that spirit that we make this recommendation, and we thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator