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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6175

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BETTINA POIRIER, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR
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The Honorable Barack H. Obama
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

Late last month, Senator Boxer announced plans to hold a hearing in October on your Administration's climate plans. According to Senator Boxer's staff, topics for discussion include: the Environmental Protection Agency's recent proposal for greenhouse gas (GHG) performance standards for new power plants, the first step in your Administration's Climate Action Plan, as well as the United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fifth Assessment Report (AR5), including the Summary for Policymakers. In July, my fellow Committee Republicans and I wrote to Senator Boxer requesting the presence of federal witnesses at a hearing entitled "Climate Change: It's Happening Now." We were denied that request, so I wrote to you to ask for your active participation in providing representatives of your Administration who Senator Boxer failed to include.

While hopeful that Senator Boxer will deliver on her announced plans to convene a hearing later this month, I reiterate that there is little point in holding a hearing on climate change policy that excludes witnesses from the federal government best suited to explain your Climate Action Plan. An Administration taking such actions on climate change should be ready to defend those actions. As your Climate Action Plan sets in motion a litany of new actions with significant economic implications, those in your Administration charged with implementing your agenda should be made available to testify as to the scope, purpose, and consequences of such unilateral action.

One example of the breadth of the undertaking includes the creation of the Interagency Working Group (IWG) on the Social Cost of Carbon (SCC). The SCC estimates developed and recently revised by the IWG are crucial to your Administration's climate change agenda because the higher the estimate, the more theoretical benefits can be attributed to costly environmental regulations. The SCC estimates will be used across the federal enterprise to justify the costs and benefits of regulations, from EPA standards for existing power plants to the approval of the Keystone pipeline. For such an important building block in your climate agenda, at least eleven Executive Branch entities worked behind closed doors without public participation or adherence to well-understood and accepted rules and guidelines. If it took at a minimum eleven Executive Branch entities to develop the SCC estimates, it would seem that it may take at least that number to implement the multitude of actions required by the Climate Action Plan, including those with an international component.

Certainly Chairman Boxer would accommodate a request by the President of the United States to have a full complement of his Administration officials undertaking this critical work to appear before the Committee. As the Committee seeks to understand the Administration's second term climate agenda – including the Federal government's domestic and international activities as well as the associated regulatory regimes, representatives from the Departments of State, Treasury, Energy, Transportation, Agriculture and Interior, as well as from the Environmental Protection Agency, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the Export Import Bank, and USAID – would help inform our thinking. Furthermore, testimony from your closest advisers on these matters, the Council of Economic Advisers, Heather Zichal, deputy assistant for energy and climate change, and John Holdren, director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, would provide insight into the decision making process.

With EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy's recent admission that EPA's climate-related rules are unlikely to have a meaningful effect on climate change indicators, along with press reports of the Administration's efforts to have the IPCC downplay in the AR5 the current 15-year hiatus in global temperature increases, an opportunity for the Administration to explain its climate agenda seems in order. The American people should not be kept in the dark regarding the scope of the actions the Administration is taking to theoretically control our climate – actions that have significant potential to negatively impact employment, job creation, and our national debt.

Sincerely,



David Vitter
Ranking Member
Committee on Environment and Public Works