

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 14, 2014

The Honorable Penny Pritzker
Secretary of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, District of Columbia 20230

Dear Secretary Pritzker:

We write today to respectfully request that you use your authority under the Export Administration Act to temporarily restrict propane exports. As you know, average residential propane prices have jumped 60 percent in the past year, causing a significant strain on middle class and low-income families across the country.

In our state of Vermont, 15 percent of all homes heat with propane, which is the highest rate in New England and the second highest in the nation. Moreover, low-income families, who can least afford the dramatic increase in costs, are more likely to use propane – 25 percent of Vermont LIHEAP recipients heat their homes with propane. It is not an exaggeration to say that some of these families are faced with choosing between heating their homes and putting food on the table.

Demand for propane has risen significantly in recent months, driven by crop drying activities in the Midwest and the current cold weather gripping much of the country. However, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, propane production is at an all-time high and domestic production far exceeds domestic demand. The problem is that almost all new propane production over the past three years has been exported to more lucrative overseas markets instead of being used to meet consumer demand right here in the United States.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the Department of Transportation have used their emergency powers to improve the delivery of propane to certain markets. However, these actions do nothing to increase overall supply.

The Export Administration Act – as continued by Presidents Bush and Obama since 2001 under the International Economic Emergency Powers Act– allows the Commerce Secretary to prohibit or curtail the export of any goods when necessary to “protect the domestic economy from the excessive drain of scarce materials and to reduce the serious inflationary impact of foreign demand.” The current propane crisis clearly meets those criteria, and warrants this urgent and decisive action.

We urge you to act quickly to temporarily restrict propane exports, to increase the domestic supply of propane, which will help reduce the financial burden on poor and middle class families across the country during this particularly cold winter. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,



PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator



BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator



PETER WELCH
United States Representative