

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 25, 2013

The Honorable Todd J. Zinser
Inspector General
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Mr. Todd J. Zinser:

Earlier this month, the Government Accountability Office added climate change to its High Risk List. GAO found that climate change “presents a significant financial risk to the federal government.” According to GAO, “[t]he federal government is not well organized to address the fiscal exposure presented by climate change.” As the co-chairs of the Bicameral Task Force on Climate Change, we are seeking your help in assessing whether the Department of Commerce is doing everything it can to confront this growing threat.

There are existing requirements that federal agencies carry out policies to address climate change. In 2007, Congress enacted the Energy Independence and Security Act, which requires federal agencies to reduce the energy intensity of federal buildings 30% by 2015, to achieve even greater reductions when renovating existing buildings or constructing new ones, and to designate an energy manager to conduct evaluations and commissioning processes. In 2009, the President issued Executive Order 13514, which directs federal agencies to establish a greenhouse gas emission reduction target for 2020, to reduce vehicle fleet petroleum use by 30% by 2020, and to ensure that 95% of applicable contracts meet sustainability requirements. The order also required the agencies to “evaluate agency climate-change risks and vulnerabilities to manage the effects of climate change on the agency’s operations and mission in both the short and long term.” In 2010, the President announced that the federal government will reduce its greenhouse gas pollution by 28% by 2020 as a result of targets submitted under Executive Order 13514.

Additionally, the President issued a memorandum requiring agencies to enhance their building energy efficiency through performance-based contracts totaling a minimum of \$2 billion across the federal government. Federal agencies also recently released their latest Strategic Sustainability Performance plans, which for the first time include their plans “to reduce the vulnerability of Federal programs, assets, and investments to the impacts of climate change, such as sea level rise or more frequent or severe extreme weather.”

As the first part of our request, we ask that you (1) identify the existing requirements in legislation, regulation, executive order, and other directives that apply to the government entity you oversee, (2) assess whether it is meeting these requirements, and (3) if it is not fully meeting the requirements, make recommendations for improving its performance.

In his State of the Union address, the President recognized that additional action by federal agencies is needed to combat climate change. The President called upon federal agencies to "identify additional executive actions from across the administration to help reduce pollution, prepare our cities and nation for the worsening effects of climate change, and accelerate the transition to more sustainable sources of energy." This call to action presents an opportunity and obligation for agencies to develop strategies to meet the challenge of preventing and responding to climate change.

As the second part of our request, we seek your assessment of (1) the authorities the government entity you oversee has to reduce emissions of heat-trapping pollution, (2) its authorities to make the nation more resilient to the effects of climate change, and (3) the most effective additional steps it could take to reduce emissions or strengthen resiliency.

Because this is now a timely matter before both the executive and legislative branches, we ask that you provide answers to these questions as expeditiously as possible, ideally no later than March 29, 2013. If you have any questions, you can contact Kiren Gopal of Rep. Waxman's House Energy and Commerce Committee staff at Kiren.Gopal@mail.house.gov or Emily Enderle of Sen. Whitehouse's staff at Emily_Enderle@whitehouse.senate.gov.

Thank you for your assistance.

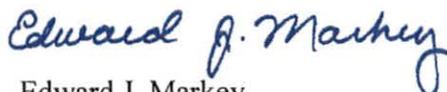
Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman
Co-Chair
Bicameral Task Force on Climate Change
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy & Commerce



Sheldon Whitehouse
Co-Chair
Bicameral Task Force on Climate Change
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight, Senate
Committee on Environment and Public Works



Edward J. Markey
Co-Chair
Bicameral Task Force on Climate Change
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources



Benjamin L. Cardin
Co-Chair
Bicameral Task Force on Climate Change
Chairman
Subcommittee on Water and Wildlife, Senate
Committee on Environment and Public Works