

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 28, 2022

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

Dear President Biden,

Given the urgent and comprehensive action required to address the climate crisis, we write to urge you to address the permitted exclusion of defense-related activities from your *Executive Order on Catalyzing Clean Energy Industries and Jobs Through Federal Sustainability*. While we commend the targets this order sets, which will help decarbonize the federal government and achieve scientifically necessary reductions in emissions, the Department of Defense (DOD) is the source of a majority of federal emissions. We cannot omit it from climate action planning.

As the December 8, 2021 executive order states, the federal government must “lead by example in order to achieve a carbon pollution-free electricity sector by 2035 and net-zero emissions economy-wide by no later than 2050.”¹ To fully lead by example would require government-wide emissions reductions, but the executive order includes an exemption for military- and defense-related sources of emissions, including vehicles, aircraft, and combat support equipment. An exemption this broad will severely undermine the executive order’s potential impact and stand in conflict with your Administration’s stated commitment to address the climate crisis at the scale it demands. This exemption will also undercut our ability to meet our nationally determined contributions under the Paris Climate Agreement.

The DOD is the single-largest consumer of energy in the United States and the world’s single-largest institutional consumer of petroleum.² Since 2001, the military has accounted for 77 to 80 percent of federal energy use.³ According to the White House’s December 2021 Federal Sustainability Plan, 56 percent of federal government emissions come from the DOD.⁴ As written, the executive order proposes a plan to decarbonize the federal government while exempting over 50 percent of federal government emissions. Put simply, we will neither achieve the reductions necessary to avoid the most catastrophic effects of climate change nor meet our economy-wide obligations under the Paris Climate Agreement while ignoring the climate impact of the U.S. military.

¹ Exec. Order No. 14057, 86 Fed. Reg. 70935, 70943 (2021).

² Neta Crawford, *Pentagon Fuel Use, Climate Change, and the Costs of War*, The Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Brown University (Jun. 19, 2019), <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2019/Pentagon%20Fuel%20Use%2C%20Climate%20Change%20and%20the%20Costs%20of%20War%20Final.pdf>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ Federal Sustainability Plan: Catalyzing America’s Clean Energy Industries and Jobs, The White House (Dec. 2021), <https://www.sustainability.gov/pdfs/federal-sustainability-plan.pdf>.

The DOD acknowledges that climate change poses major security threats, including “mass migration events or political crises, civil unrest, shifts in the regional balance of power, or even state failure.”⁵ According to the DOD’s 2021 Climate Risk Analysis Report:

Climate impacts, such as increased competition over scarce resources, are likely to contribute to internal tensions within countries, as well as external tensions between countries. As the likelihood of multiple converging extreme events increases with climate change, risks can compound and put enormous pressure on any government’s capacity to respond, increasing the possibility of cascading security impacts.⁶

However, the global threats outlined in the Climate Risk Analysis Report are not predestined. The U.S. military has a role to play in reducing the risk of climate-driven security threats by minimizing its own contribution to the climate crisis. Unfortunately, thus far, the DOD has failed to detail the specific steps it will take to help reach your commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent by 2030 and to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Congress is taking steps to push the DOD to finally elaborate on its decarbonization efforts, targets, and timeline — addressing an information gap that executive order’s exemptions enable. The bipartisan *National Defense Authorization Act of 2022 (NDAA)* requires the Secretary of Defense to submit to Congress a plan to reduce the DOD’s greenhouse gas emissions and provide annual reports to Congress on the DOD’s progress toward meeting science-based emissions targets.⁷ In order to avoid the worst-case climate change scenario, scientists are clear that policies must limit the global temperature increase to no greater than 1.5 degrees celsius above pre-industrial levels.⁸ The DOD’s science-based targets should align with the Biden administration’s economy-wide targets and form the basis for the DOD emissions reduction plan as well.

In light of your commitment to a “government-wide approach” to tackling the climate crisis, we encourage you to remove defense-related exemptions from your executive order on federal sustainability. We also request that you provide a list of any broad exemptions that have already been requested and granted under the existing framework. Holding the DOD accountable to the ambitious emissions reduction targets outlined in your executive order is not at odds with ensuring our security, it strengthens it. As Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin himself attested, “Climate change is an existential threat to our nation’s security and the Department of Defense must act swiftly and boldly to take on this challenge.”⁹ We urge you to task the Department to

⁵ Department of Defense Climate Risk Analysis, Department of Defense, Office of the Undersecretary for Policy, (Oct. 2021), <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Oct/21/2002877353/-1/-1/0/DOD-CLIMATE-RISK-ANALYSIS-FINAL.PDF>.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022, Pub. L. No. 117-81 (2021).

⁸ Myles Allen et al., *Global Warming of 1.5°C: Summary for Policymakers*, IPCC (Dec. 2018), <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/chapter/spm/>.

⁹ Statement by Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin III on the Department of Defense Climate Adaptation Plan, U.S. Department of Defense (Oct. 7, 2021), <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2803761/statement-by-secretary-of-defense-loyd-j-austin-iii-on-the-department-of-defen/>.

act boldly, rather than exempt itself from this necessary mission, and we look forward to working with your Administration to combat climate change across the federal government.

Sincerely,



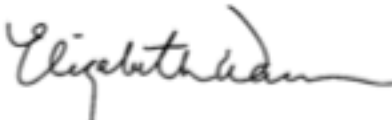
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United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.
Member of Congress



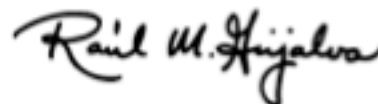
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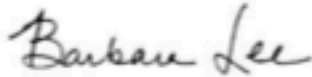
Pramila Jayapal
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Ro Khanna
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Eleanor Holmes Norton
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Barbara Lee
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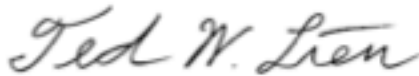
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



Andy Levin
Member of Congress



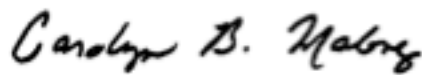
Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress



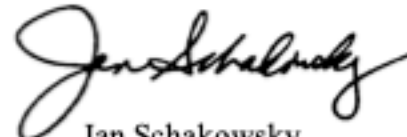
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Bonnie Watson Coleman
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Peter Welch
Member of Congress



Nikema Williams
Member of Congress

cc: Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III, Secretary of Defense