

November 14, 2011

Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction

Co-Chair Sen. Patty Murray, 448 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510

Co-Chair Rep. Jeb Hensarling, 129 Cannon HOB, Washington, D.C. 20515

CC: Sen. Max Baucus; Sen. John Kerry; Sen. Jon Kyl; Sen. Rob Portman; Sen. Pat Toomey; Rep. Xavier Becerra; Rep. Jim Clyburn; Rep. Dave Camp; Rep. Fred Upton; Rep. Chris Van Hollen

We, the undersigned, are writing to ask the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction to make cuts in federal spending that will save American taxpayers billions of dollars per year and help prevent an increase in public health costs, pollution, and a worsening of climate change.¹ We urge the Committee to remove subsidies for so-called “renewable” biomass and waste combustion for electricity—a polluting form of energy that competes with genuinely clean, renewable energy sources, such as community-scale solar and wind.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration calculates \$1,117,000,000 of federal subsidies diverted to biomass combustion from direct expenditures, tax expenditures, research & development, Department of Energy Loan Guarantee Program, and Federal & RUS electricity in 2010.² As of May 2011, \$102,532,534 of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding has financed the construction of nine biomass power facilities. There are hundreds of these facilities under construction or in the process of permitting which will draw on the current Investment Tax Credit (ITC) or Production Tax Credit (PTC) for billions more in the next decade.

The Committee can protect American taxpayers from bearing the burden of these costly subsidies by eliminating federal supports for these uneconomical, controversial, and polluting biomass power facilities.

Threats to Public Health from Biomass Burning

Burning biomass emits dioxin, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and higher levels of particulate matter, carbon monoxide, and volatile organic compounds than burning coal, which can cause heart problems, lung disease, and cancer.³ A large and increasing number of public health organizations and medical professionals are strongly opposed to the construction of new biomass power facilities, including the American Lung Association, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the Massachusetts Medical Society.⁴

Biomass combustion—or any form of incineration—is not clean energy and will drive up already soaring health care costs for Americans, particularly low income residents and communities of color (environmental justice communities) that often live in close proximity to biomass power facilities.⁵

Climate Impacts from Biomass Burning

A major push behind renewable energy is to combat the worsening of climate change. While solar and wind projects emit no carbon dioxide (CO₂) after construction, biomass energy facilities emit greater quantities of CO₂ emissions from the smokestack than coal burning power plants.⁶ In June 2010, the

¹ http://nobiomassburning.org/BAP/Home_files/Biomass%20Electricity%20Report.pdf

² <http://www.eia.gov/analysis/requests/subsidy/pdf/subsidy.pdf>

³ <http://www.pfpi.net/air-pollution-2>

⁴ <http://www.bredl.org/pdf3/SecondOpinion.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/>

⁶ <http://www.pfpi.net/carbon-emissions>

“Biomass Sustainability and Carbon Policy Study,” commissioned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (also known as the “Manomet Study”), concluded that biomass power generation emits higher levels of greenhouse gases than coal over a 40 year time frame, and higher levels than natural gas over a 90 year time frame.⁷

Forest Degradation Caused by Biomass Subsidies

The expansion of biomass energy would add even greater stresses to our nation’s already-impacted forests, which provide valuable economic benefits of tourism, recreation, and forest products, as well as indispensable ecological services of clean air, pure drinking water, and flood control.⁸ Most immediately, the expansion of biomass energy risks hastening the spread of invasive forest pests like the emerald ash borer, which will result in billions of dollars in economic losses.^{9,10}

Low Hanging Fruit: Biomass Power Subsidies

At a time when our nation is faced with a mounting federal deficit, record high unemployment, and a ballooning number of Americans who are struggling to pay the bills, cutting of government funding to private industries and corporations that take subsidies for industrial biomass power combustion must be on the table. Scarce and precious taxpayer dollars that Americans expect to be invested in the future of clean energy development must no longer be diverted to costly, inefficient, polluting, 19th century technology, which is in many ways worse than the dirty fossil fuels it would replace.

Sincerely,

Appalachian Ohio Sierra Club, Loraine McCosker, OH
Biofuelwatch, Rachel Smolker, VT
Biomass Accountability Project, Meg Sheehan, MA
Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League, Therese Vick, NC
Boundary County Concerned Citizens, Linda Langness, ID
Buckeye Forest Council, Cheryl Johncox, OH
Citizens Environmental Coalition, Barbara Warren, NY
Concerned Citizens of Perryville, Linda Graff, MO
Dogwood Alliance, Scot Quaranda, NC
Energy Justice Network, Mike Ewall, DC
Environmental Alliance of North Florida, Rick Causey, FL
Florida Environmental Justice Network, December McSherry, FL
Florida League of Conservation Voters, Joy Towles Ezell, FL
Florida League of Conservation Voters Education Fund, Helen Spivey, FL
Floridians Against Incinerators in Disguise, Susie Caplowe, FL
Friends of the Earth, Michal Rosenoer, DC
Friends of the Fenholloway River, Rebecca Edwards, FL
Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, Ananda Tan, CA
Grassroots Ozark, Tom Kruzen, MO
Green Party of Florida, Michael Canney, FL
Greenpeace, Larry Edwards, DC
Healthy Dubois County, Rev. Dr. Christopher Breedlove, IN
Healthy Dubois County, Norma Kreilein, MD, FFAP, IN
Heartwood, Ernie Reed, VA

⁷ http://www.manomet.org/sites/manomet.org/files/Manomet_Biomass_Report_Full_LoRez.pdf

⁸ <http://www.fs.fed.us/ecosystemservices/>

⁹ <http://www.forestwellness.com/>

¹⁰ <http://www.usna.usda.gov/Gardens/faqs/EmeraldAshBorer.html>

Help Our Polluted Environment, Ted Ezell, FL
Massachusetts Forest Watch, Chris Matera, MA
Missouri Coalition for the Environment, Kathleen Logan Smith, MO
NAACP Valdosta-Lowndes, Leigh Touchton, GA
Ohio Sierra Club (Forests and Public Lands Committee), Bob Kyle, OH
Olympic Peninsula Power Shift, Diana Somerville, WA
Preserve Pepe'ekeo Health & Environment, Bridget Rapoza, HI
PT AirWatchers, Gretchen Brewer, WA
Save Our Rural Oregon, Paul Fouch, OR
Sacred Lands (Southern Albany County Reporting Environmental Dangers), Jim Travers, NY
Save America's Forests, Carl Ross, DC
Sequoia Forestkeeper, Ara Maderosian, CA
The Biomass Monitor, Josh Schlossberg, VT
Washington Citizens for Clean Energy, Toby Thaler, WA
Wild Virginia, David Hannah, VA
Winding Waters Group Sierra Club, Tim Wilson, IN
Wiregrass Activists for Clean Energy, Michael Noll, GA
Dr. William Blackley, M.D., Fellow American Academy of Family Practice, NC
Addie Jacobson, M.A., CA
Dr. Ron Saff, M.D., FL
Dr. William Sammons, M.D., MA
Paula H. Stahmer, A.A.L., FL