

Heinrich urges Biden to shift from oil and gas

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U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-NM) joined with four other senators in urging the administration of President Joe Biden, via a recent letter, to support the nation's shift away from fossil fuels in light of the recent energy crisis brought on by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

After the events in Ukraine, world leaders -- including Biden -- condemned Russia's actions and the U.S. imposed a ban on oil imports from the eastern European nation as other countries sought to remove the aggressor of the attacks from the global economy. Russia is the world's second-largest producer of fossil fuels, providing up to a third of Europe's energy hundreds of thousands of barrels of oil to the U.S. daily. Taking Russian imports out of global trade led to gas price to climb to \$4 a gallon throughout New Mexico and the U.S.

The supply disruption met increased demands as the U.S. recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic, and travel and business restrictions were lifted.

The senators argued the rising prices were hurting American consumers, and that the situation was emblematic of the need for the U.S. to shift away from fossil fuels like oil and gas.

New Mexico, Heinrich's home state, could be particularly impacted

by such an energy transition as it ranks second in the nation for oil production, and ninth in natural gas, and fossil fuels provide for about a third of the state's budget.

He and the other lawmakers argued Biden could use powers provided by the Defense Production Act to support increased manufacturing capacity for technologies that would reduce demand for oil and as such as electric fuel pumps and other appliance, along with renewable energy installations.

'We encourage you to examine all possible routes to support and deploy clean energy and energy-efficient electric technologies as part of our near-term domestic and international response to the economic upheaval caused by Russia's war on Ukraine,' the letter read. 'There is no separating Russian fossil fuels from the corruption and human rights abuses of President Vladimir Putin's regime.'

Shift away from oil and gas, or ramp up U.S. production?

About 40 percent of Russia's state revenue comes from oil and gas, read the letter, and the U.S. in 2021 imported about 670,000 barrels a day from the country, making up about 7 percent of U.S. oil imports. The senators contended that if this economic relationship was allowed to continue, the U.S. would be complicit in Russia's international aggression.

'Until the United States and European countries eliminate their dependence on Russian fossil fuels, they will be tied to Russia's war efforts,' read the letter.

To do so would mean the federal administration, along with the ban

on Russian imports, must support an increase in electrical appliances like heat pumps by guaranteeing federal contracts and offering financial incentives, the letter read, to increase production of such technologies. Americans relied on methane, a main component of natural gas, for about 42 percent of their heating needs, and 8 percent from petroleum last year, per the letter, while the residential and commercial sectors accounted for 22 percent and 18 percent, respectively, of American energy consumption in 2020.

The lawmakers contended the use of more energy-efficient heat pumps could reduce U.S. oil consumption by 71 million barrels a year and cut demand for natural gas.

Shifting away from fossil fuels would lower costs, insulate the U.S. from a volatile market, and mitigate the impacts of pollution and climate change, read the letter.

'Due to the humanitarian, energy, and economic crises caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we urge you to use all the tools and authority at your disposal to provide relief to our residents and allies and take preemptive steps to limit future instability caused by climate change and conflict funded by fossil fuel profits,' the letter read.