Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 31, 2014

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to bring to your attention a matter of urgent importance to our constituents in Wisconsin. Nearly 250,000 residents and countless businesses throughout the state are experiencing a severe propane crisis this winter. This shortage is preventing families from keeping their homes warm during the coldest months of the year. We write to you today to request several actions that will help mitigate the current crisis and also ensure that a similar shortage does not occur in the future.

Several factors contributed to this propane crisis, including increased usage due to a late and wet corn harvest, the loss of the Cochin supply pipeline from late November to late December, constrained rail service, and unusually frigid temperatures. Though the Wisconsin Department of Transportation lifted truck weight restrictions in an effort to increase the amount of propane carried in a single trip, many trucks are traveling as far as Mississippi only to wait in line for hours to receive less-than-full tanks of propane. The cumulative effect is that the price of propane in Wisconsin has risen to unprecedented levels of $6 per gallon in some parts of the state. This time last year, average rates were $1.50 per gallon.

We are grateful for the U.S. Department of Transportation's recent decision to issue emergency exemptions from the Hours of Service rules for propane and other home heating fuels. This will provide helpful relief to operators as they work to deliver propane to our constituents as quickly and efficiently as possible. Given the drastic spike in prices and dangerously cold temperatures in the state, we request that you extend the Department's current hours-of-service waiver through March.

Not only are Wisconsin residents having difficulty finding suppliers to refill their propane tanks, but many residents are unable to pay such exorbitant prices to heat their homes. Fortunately, the state recently made additional funds available for residents through Wisconsin's Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), as well as additional funds for loan guarantee programs for propane suppliers. Ultimately, however, Wisconsinites are experiencing a real health and safety crisis for those households unable to find or pay for the propane necessary to heat their homes and businesses.

With this in mind, we are supportive of any options for using LIHEAP at the federal level to assist families during this emergency. While we recognize the competing interests of different states during winter months, we urge your Administration to take advantage of any possible flexibility in the program to help Wisconsin families manage their resources during this unique time of hardship. We specifically ask that you encourage the Small Business Administration to ease loan requirements so that our communities can get the quick relief they so desperately need.

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We fear that the continued constraints on Wisconsin's propane supply could lead to another crisis in the coming years. Whether truck or pipeline deliveries are increased, it is critical to find a safe and dedicated supplier of propane to our state. We recommend that your Administration undertake a wholesale, broad-based investigation of this problem, looking at all possible causes of the shortage currently facing Upper Midwestern families and possible solutions to the problem both short and long-term. We urge you to engage as many of your agencies as possible, including potentially the Department of Energy, the Department of Transportation, and the Federal Trade Commission.

In closing, we thank you for your attention to this matter. Given the severity of the problem, and its impact on Wisconsin families during the coldest months of the year, we urge your Administration to work with us on these and other actions as quickly as possible. It is imperative that families across Wisconsin be relieved of the struggle they have faced during these frigid winter months.

Sincerely,

Ron Kind
Member of Congress

Reid J. Ribble
Member of Congress

Sean P. Duffy
Member of Congress

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Ron Johnson
United States Senator

Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.
Member of Congress

Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

Thomas E. Petri
Member of Congress

Paul Ryan
Member of Congress