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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6150

WWW.ENERGY.SENATE.GOV

November 5, 2021

The Honorable Jennifer Granholm
Secretary
Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Secretary Granholm,

I am writing to obtain answers to questions regarding your endorsement of a “No” vote on Question 1 of the 2021 Maine Referendum Election ballot. As you know, on October 28, 2021, you used your official Twitter account to make this endorsement. You tweeted, “The @NECEC_ME transmission line will bring clean energy to New England and reduce carbon emissions equivalent to taking 700k cars off the road. I hope Mainers vote NO on ONE to keep this project moving and reliable, affordable, [#CleanEnergy](#) flowing!”

The use of federal government resources to unduly influence a state election is irresponsible, and contrary to the principles of federalism. Voters in state and local elections deserve to exercise their democratic freedoms without the federal government attempting to sway their opinion. This is especially important given the major foreign influence documented over the course of the “No” campaign for Question 1 where Avangrid and its subsidiaries spent over \$16 million to oppose this measure.

Furthermore, the Department of Energy has issued ethics guidance titled “Fourteen Principles of Ethical Conduct for Federal Employees.” This guidance is based on Executive Order 12674. Section 8 states that “employees shall act impartially and not give preferential treatment to any private organization or individual.” Furthermore, Section 14 states that “employees shall endeavor to avoid any actions creating the appearance that they are violating the law or the ethical standards set forth in the Standards of Ethical Conduct.” Your October 28th tweet appears to violate this guidance.

It is imperative American citizens have faith in the impartiality of political appointees. Equally important is the maintenance of the highest ethical standards by representatives of our federal government. I ask that you respond to the following questions no later than November 19, 2021.

Sincerely,



John Barrasso, M.D.
Ranking Member

Questions

1. How did you first become aware of Question 1 of the 2021 Maine Referendum Election ballot?
2. Did you engage with any groups or individuals who either supported or opposed Question 1?
3. Did you meet with any individuals or entities required to register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) who acted on behalf of Avangrid, a majority-owned Spanish company, or its subsidiaries with respect to Question 1?
4. Were you encouraged to draft your October 28th tweet by an external entity outside of the Department of Energy?
5. Before you sent your October 28th tweet, did you seek the advice of the designated ethics official for the department?
6. Since you have assumed the office of the secretary, have you advocated for a political party, candidate for partisan political office, or partisan political group?
7. Do you believe it is appropriate to use the resources of the federal government in order to advocate for political or special interest positions?
8. Do you believe the use of your official title in your support of political measures and/or candidates unduly influences voters in a way that the average voter cannot replicate?