

United States Senate

May 6, 2024

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

Dear Secretary Granholm,

You recently issued a [statement](#) claiming, “The Biden-Harris administration is practicing what we preach. Just as we are helping households and businesses across the nation save money by saving energy, we are doing the same in our own federal buildings.”

Your release goes on to say the administration will be “providing resources, opportunities for grant funding, training, and technical assistance” to achieve the goal of “net-zero emissions from all federal buildings.” This sounds more like another excuse to spend taxpayer dollars on a Green New Deal jobs program, since the Biden administration is wasting money and energy operating empty office buildings all over Washington, D.C. as bureaucrats continue working from home.

Not a single department or agency is currently utilizing even half of the available office space in their headquarters buildings, according to the [Government Accountability Office](#) (GAO). Your department is using only 25 percent of its building.

[GAO points out](#), “emissions—and their associated monetary costs—are still generated with underutilized space because agencies continue to operate buildings even when staff are not in the office.” GAO further notes office buildings “have environmental costs, and reduction in office space could reduce those costs.”

The occupancy in government buildings in Washington, D.C. is at 26 percent capacity or less according to another analysis, conducted by the [Public Buildings Reform Board](#) (PBRB or “the Board”) using cell phone tracking data.

PBRB counted *just 8 people a day showing up at Department of Energy (DOE) headquarters*. Recognizing this number appears flawed, the Board contacted the department for clarification. They are still awaiting a response from DOE—perhaps because nobody is home!

Echoing GAO, PBRB warns the “amount of money being spent per person per year” to maintain these buildings “is at absurdly high levels,” concluding “the per person carbon emissions from heating and cooling nearly empty buildings, not to mention energy costs, are indefensible.”

The [Federal Assets Sale and Transfer Act](#) requires that “each Federal agency shall provide, upon request, any and all information and data regarding its civilian real properties to the Board.” I would, therefore, remind you of your obligation under the law and urge you to promptly provide the PBRB with the average number of DOE employees who are showing up to work on a daily basis and any other data it has requested or will request so the Board can complete its task of identifying “opportunities for the Government to reduce significantly its inventory of civilian real property and reduce costs to the Government,” as mandated by Congress.

If the administration is serious about practicing what it preaches on energy conservation, instead of spending more money, you could instead stop paying to heat, cool, light, and operate the ghost town of vacant buildings all around Washington, D.C.

Camouflaging new government spending in green doesn’t save money or energy. You can go green without going in the red by reducing the size of unused and unnecessary government buildings. Now that’s *the real green new deal* for taxpayers!

Sincerely,



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator