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July 8, 2008

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Acting Comptroller General of the United States
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

I write today with respect to the high cost of gasoline. Today, the average cost of a gallon of regular gasoline is more than \$4.10. This is an increase of well over a dollar a gallon from a year ago.

As you know, each and every day, Americans struggle to cope with this rapid, record increase in fuel costs. Across the United States, individual Americans are taking their own initiatives to find ways to reduce gas consumption through driving less, altering daily routines, and even changing or cancelling family vacation plans.

To date, as far as I can determine, the federal government has taken few, if any, initiatives to join in this national effort to help address this ever increasing crisis.

I believe it is essential that we continue to modernize our energy infrastructure and develop a reliable, commonsense American energy strategy – one that includes new supplies from domestic exploration and extraction, encourages conservation, and promotes the use and advancement of clean, renewable energies.

However, the truth is that new technologies and new sources of energy will not provide meaningful relief for years to come as new technologies are developed and as new sources of energy are discovered and extracted. We must be straight with the American public and not raise hopes that these efforts will provide immediate solutions and possible relief.

There are ways to give some immediate relief. In my view, new conservation efforts are the quickest way to see an immediate reduction in the price of gas at the pump. The American public is already doing its part through individual means of cutting back.

On a federal level, on May 22, 2008, Senator Bingaman and I introduced, and the Senate unanimously passed by voice vote, a sense-of-the-Senate resolution (S. Res. 577) that urged the President to initiate, among all federal departments and agencies of the executive branch, a reduction of their daily consumption of gasoline - if only by a small percentage.

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To my knowledge, the administration has not responded to the Senate's action. In the absence of pending administration action, Congress should join with the public and make the concepts in the sense-of-the-Senate resolution a mandatory law.

Turning to another concept, I call to your attention action taken by the Congress and the executive branch during a similar petroleum shortage that occurred in 1973 and 1974. In January 1974, the President signed into law "The Emergency Highway Energy Conservation Act" (Public Law 93-239), which passed both the House and Senate unanimously. This law was enacted in an effort to conserve fuel.

Specifically, the law put forth inducements for states to reduce speed limits to 55 miles per hour (mph) on all major highways. Failure to do so would jeopardize the ability of states to secure federal highway funds. The law was originally intended to be temporary, ceasing to be in effect if the President declared that there was no longer a fuel shortage or on or after June 30, 1975, whichever occurred first.

According to a Congressional Research Service report, the law resulted in reduced consumption of 167,000 barrels of petroleum a day, a roughly 2 percent reduction in the nation's highway fuel consumption. In addition, the National Academy of Sciences found that the law saved up to 4,000 lives per year from highway accidents. Given the significant increase in the number of vehicles on America's highway system from 1974 to 2008, one could assume that the amount of fuel that could be conserved today is far greater.

Given the fuel savings of the act, and the resulting significant decrease in highway fatalities attributable to the national speed limit, Congress made the national speed limit permanent in December 1974. In 1995, the law was repealed.

The purpose of this letter is to ask you to study this era of conservation, as I have, to determine whether the administration, with the support of Congress, should take similar action today.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, engineering data shows that fuel efficiency decreases rapidly above 60 mph. Specifically, for every 5 mph an individual drives over 60 mph, that individual essentially is paying an extra 30 cents per gallon in fuel costs.

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As Congress continues to look for ways to ease this national problem, I ask you to examine the following questions:

- (1) Given the significant technological improvements in automobile design and function since 1974, at what speed is the typical vehicle traveling on America's highways today most fuel efficient?
- (2) If a national speed limit was enacted similar to the 1974 law, but the speed limit under that law was consistent with most fuel efficient speed for the typical vehicle traveling on America's highways, what would be a reasonable projection for total fuel savings? And, what would be the savings for the average citizen who owns and operates a vehicle?
- (3) If a new national speed limit was enacted consistent with the two questions listed above, how many fewer barrels of petroleum a day would Americans consume? Is it reasonable to believe that there would be a reduction in price at the pump? And, if so, what are the ranges you could project for cost reductions?
- (4) If the federal government took the initiative to reduce its oil consumption, consistent the concepts of the sense-of-the-Senate resolution (S. Res. 577) how many fewer barrels of petroleum a day would be saved by the federal government?

Given that Congress is vigorously considering all options, your response to this request could be of great help to my colleagues and me.

With kind regards, I am

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Warner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John Warner

JW/chm