



May 29, 2024

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senate
Hart Senate Office Building, Room 530
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Whitehouse,

Thank you for your long-standing efforts to help mitigate the worst impacts of climate change and to build a dialogue around the best ways to achieve success.

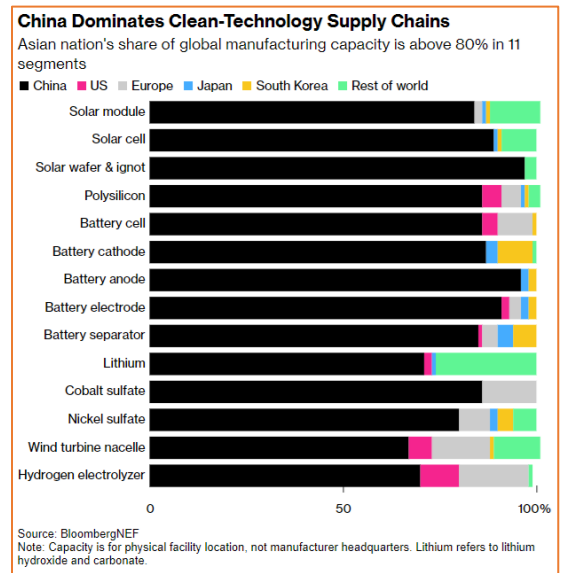
Following the report released by former Obama Administration Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz, PhD, on April 30, 2024, we read with concern your recent comments that energy security can be achieved if America fully transitions to wind, solar, geothermal, and other renewable energy sources, since these resources are “free and not controlled by any one country.”¹

While we agree with and support the value of scaling up renewables and battery storage capacity to further reduce carbon emissions, the energy security issue is far more complex than your comment suggests: **it would significantly increase our reliance on foreign adversaries like China.**

Bloomberg News recently highlighted how much of clean-tech is controlled by China² - including silicon, lithium, cobalt, nickel, and others – energy security interests that have caused concern in the Biden Administration’s ability to achieve its vision of a clean energy future. **In fact, White House advisor Amos Hochstein called this “one of the most important challenges and national security risks overall.”³**

According to the Paris-based *International Energy Association*, China accounts for over 90 percent of rare earth mineral processing.⁴ With a 43-fold increase in lithium needed in the years ahead, and a 60 percent power grid expansion (according to Princeton University⁵) these are urgently critical factors which America’s decision makers must consider, not dismiss.

This power grid expansion - including thousands of miles of new transmission lines - will rely, for example, on massive amounts of water-intensive copper production, over half of which is mined in geographies with “high water stress levels.” Several producing regions, like Australia, China and Africa, pose significant challenges “in ensuring reliable and sustainable supplies,” the IEA found.



¹ <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/05052024/ernest-moniz-natural-gas-report-industry-ties-congressional-democrats/>
² <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2024-04-16/china-extends-clean-tech-dominance-over-us-despite-biden-s-ira-blueprint>
³ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/news/transcripts/amos-hochstein-on-how-critical-minerals-impact-net-zero-progress-and-us-national-security/>
⁴ <https://www.iea.org/reports/the-role-of-critical-minerals-in-clean-energy-transitions/executive-summary>
⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/15/climate/america-next-decade-climate.html>

Ironically, the same media outlet in which you were quoted, *Inside Climate News*, highlighted the very next day the negative environmental impacts of increased critical mining in Eastern Europe and Asia in support of the energy transition.⁶ Cobalt mines in the poorest countries like the Congo have created toxic working conditions “on par with slavery” as hundreds of thousands have been displaced because villages were bulldozed to make space for mine operations.⁷ In South Africa, workers are suffering neurological damage from manganese refining.⁸ In Argentina, lithium mines are decimating indigenous water supplies and upending ecosystems.⁹ And in Indonesia - which is set to produce two-thirds of the world’s nickel needs¹⁰ - poisoned red waterways are upending traditional ways of life. **As Democrats, we shouldn’t turn a blind eye to humanitarian and environmental damage when it’s happening outside of our borders.**

China has also demonstrated it will use access to its mineral supply chains to advance its geopolitical interests, such as territorial disputes with Japan.¹¹ The world also witnessed in 2022 what happened in Europe, due to relying too heavily on hostile nations for its energy sources. Fortunately, it was America’s natural gas industry that quickly mobilized support to stabilize the economies of our democratic allies following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

America already learned lessons in the 1970s, with oil shortages caused by foreign cartels like OPEC; later diversifying its energy sources to stabilize its economy and energy systems. Putting the United States back on a single-source foreign supplier of critical energy systems is a risky gamble.

While it is true that China’s world-leading installation of solar and wind has been swift,¹² it is simultaneously building on average two coal power plants per week to fill the variability gaps in power production without a cleaner option like natural gas. It is growing coal dependency across Asia despite renewable investments, which has raised the concern of former U.S. Climate Envoy John Kerry over the world’s inability to reverse climate damage.

At Natural Allies, we believe having a practical discussion about these issues – including the trilemma that Secretary Moniz cites: environment, equity, and security - is necessary for a bipartisan way forward on mitigating climate change.

As you know, it is natural gas replacing coal in America’s power sector that has accounted for 61% of our world-leading carbon emission reductions since 2005.¹³ It is also at the core of our energy independence.

We believe strongly that renewables with natural gas is a proven solution that works - and works quickly - to drive down emissions. Speed is necessary to confront the worst impacts of climate change.

We would appreciate having a more constructive dialogue with you at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Mary Landrieu
Former U.S. Senator
D-Louisiana



Tim Ryan
Former Congressman
D-Ohio



Kendrick Meek
Former Congressman
D-Florida



Michael Nutter
Former Mayor
D-Philadelphia

⁶ <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/06052024/eastern-europe-central-asia-critical-mineral-mining-rights-abuse/>

⁷ <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2023/02/01/1152893248/red-cobalt-congo-drc-mining-siddharth-kara>

⁸ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2023/ev-mineral-manganese-south-africa/>

⁹ <https://apnews.com/article/lithium-water-mining-indigenous-cb2f5b1580c12f8ba1b19223648069b7>

¹⁰ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-66131451>

¹¹ <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/chinas-rare-earths-dominance-focus-after-mineral-export-curbs-2023-07-05/>

¹² <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-01-26/china-added-more-solar-panels-in-2023-than-us-did-in-its-entire-history>

¹³ https://www.eia.gov/environment/emissions/carbon/pdf/2023_Appendix_A_methodology.pdf