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July 7, 2015

The Honorable Ernest Moniz
Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Secretary Moniz:

I write today regarding a recent proposed rule to increase the efficiency of gas and propane hearth products. While I continue to support efforts to increase the efficiency of our nation's appliances, I ask that you consider the impact these new standards could have on small businesses and manufacturers as the agency develops a final rule.

The standard, first proposed in January 2015, would apply to all vented or ventless hearth products, including space heating hearth products, decorative products, gas logs, gas stoves, and outdoor hearth products. Among its provisions, the proposal would require manufacturers to eliminate the continuously burning pilot light present in many products.

These standards have the potential to save consumers money, reduce the impact on the environment and spur innovation, but it is critical that the agency carefully consider the impact these rules may have on small businesses and manufacturers. Recently, I've heard from several small businesses in Vermont about the regulatory challenges they are managing in the face of a rapid accumulation of new federal regulatory requirements from a number of different agencies. Companies like Hearthstone Stoves located in Morrisville, VT and Vermont Castings in Bethel, VT have been manufacturing quality, efficient products for years and are economic drivers in the region. These small businesses are committed to producing clean, efficient products, but are concerned that the Department's new proposed rule, in combination with other federal rules, are resulting in significantly increased costs in areas such as product design and compliance testing.

These additional costs can impact the end consumer, and subsequently the adoption rate of the new technologies the Department is seeking to advance the use of. If new equipment is seen by consumers as being cost prohibitive, it may disincentivize the adoption of more efficient equipment. Such an outcome would undermine the ability of the Department to meet its policy goals as well as the ability of consumers to reap the benefits of high-efficiency heating equipment.

New regulations must achieve a balance. As you develop a final rule for hearth products, I urge you to carefully consider these concerns and ensure the final efficiency standard appropriately balances energy policy goals with practical cost impacts. Additionally, I ask that you work with small businesses like Hearthstone and Vermont Castings to provide the resources and technical assistance they need to meet any new efficiency standards that are developed.

Thank for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Peter Welch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and "W".

PETER WELCH
Member of Congress