

<https://www.utilitydive.com/news/an-open-letter-to-energy-secretary-granholm-policy-is-too-important-to-be/596020/>

## **An open letter to Energy Secretary Granholm: Policy is too important to be made behind closed doors**



*The image by TechCrunch is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#)*

### **AUTHOR**

Howard Crystal

### **PUBLISHED**

March 3, 2021

*The following is a contributed article by Howard Crystal, legal director of the Center for Biological Diversity's Energy Justice Program.*

Dear Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm:

During the last four years, we wasted precious time that should've been spent working feverishly toward a just, clean energy transition. And the public has been kept in the dark.

As a litigator with more than two decades of experience in energy policy, I've seen up close the agency's long history of developing energy policy behind closed doors.

The Trump administration put fossil fuel industry lobbyists in charge at the Department of Energy and stifled the herculean efforts of career officials to carry out its mission. These industry lobbyists suppressed dozens of studies showing the benefits of clean energy, skewing capital investments and misleading the public.

In recent interviews, and during your confirmation hearing, you emphasized the department's cutting-edge research and crucial role in scaling up clean energy jobs. You must prioritize public transparency and engagement to further these goals. Future generations need you to be successful in addressing climate change by helping break our addiction to fossil fuels and reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

You won easy Senate confirmation, with solid bipartisan support. But telling the truth, in public, will be critical to your success.

You've worked with states, cities, unions and others to promote a clean energy future. You know an urgent, just transition to 100% renewable energy is necessary for the continued existence of life on our planet. You know it will create millions of jobs and save billions of dollars. And now you have new incentives from Congress.

The Energy Act of 2020 requires more than 10 renewable energy initiatives to help fulfill Congress' new directive to "meet 100 percent of the power demand in the United States through clean, renewable, or zero emission energy sources."

That's an exciting opportunity that gives hope to grizzled attorneys like me who have seen obfuscation when there should have been collaborative efforts to move away from fossil fuels and explain to the public why this is not only vitally important, but eminently doable.

In the early 2000s, I was part of a team challenging the secretive Cheney Energy Task Force, which worked closely with utility and fossil fuel executives to develop policies that largely served to entrench the fossil-fuel energy system we must now radically transform. Only after multiple public records lawsuits did the department ultimately disclose how the agency was developing national energy policies.

Things got worse under Trump. The Energy Department refused to release an important study showing how grid investments could unleash billions in savings by facilitating delivery of renewable energy resources. The agency released the Interconnections Seam Study only after the Center for Biological Diversity sued under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

The department has been similarly secretive about another initiative addressing the reliability and resiliency of North America's power grid, forcing the Center to file yet another FOIA lawsuit to understand the department's plans to address important issues surrounding the nation's power grid.

The Center and other groups recently called on Congress to strengthen FOIA and improve the way agencies handle public records requests. Happily, Congress has also recently made clear it wants to see more transparency in energy policy, directing the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to open a new Office of Public Participation.

All of this is to say that it's absolutely critical for you to bring openness to development of our nation's energy policy, and you have a clear mandate to do so.

First and foremost, consumer and environmental stakeholders must play a central role. For too long they've been shoved aside in favor of corporations that advocate on behalf of private, not public, interests.

Second, the public should not have to resort to legal action to learn how the department is carrying out congressional mandates. Your department should make decisions transparently and promptly respond to public records requests.

Finally, your agency's scientists must be free to conduct research and publish their work without interference, political or corporate.

These approaches can help ensure that the Department of Energy fulfills its important mission to support a rapid clean energy transition that puts the public first, including ensuring that all people have access to clean, reliable, affordable energy sources.

There's a lot riding on your shoulders. And it's not just energy advocates rooting for your success. Your climate decisions will have a huge effect on the welfare of all Americans — and virtually every being on the planet.