

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927
Minority (202) 225-3641

September 27, 2012

The Honorable Steven Chu
Secretary
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585

The Honorable Lisa Jackson
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Ariel Rios Building
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Secretary Chu and Administrator Jackson:

We are writing to request an update on the status of federal efforts to increase the energy efficiency of the tens of thousands of data centers across the country that store digital information and act as the foundation of the information industry.

According to a September 22, 2012, article in the *New York Times*, “[m]ost data centers, by design, consume vast amounts of energy in an incongruously wasteful manner.”¹ The article explains that “data centers can waste 90 percent or more of the electricity they pull off the grid” because “[o]nline companies typically run their facilities at maximum capacity around the clock, whatever the demand.”

These facilities consume a tremendous amount of electricity. In 2010, approximately 2% of all electricity used in the United States was consumed by data centers.² In addition, data centers frequently use diesel generators to provide backup power. These diesel generators can be the source of a significant amount of toxic air pollution.

¹ *New York Times*, Power, Pollution and the Internet (Sep. 22, 2012).

² *Id.*

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The *New York Times* article examines incentives that may be contributing to the waste of huge amounts of energy. According to the article, since the early 1990's, the companies that operate these data centers have almost exclusively focused on avoiding crashes and maintaining service. As one former industry official explained, "A crash or slowdown could end a career."³ An Electric Power Research Institute official noted that data center operators "don't get a bonus for saving on the electric bill. They get a bonus for having the data center available 99.999 percent of the time." Moreover, utilities may encourage this behavior with low electricity rates for these "prized customers" with "unvarying round-the-clock loads." According to the article, "[l]arge, steady consumption is profitable for utilities because it allows them to plan their own power purchases in advance and market their services at night, when demand by other customers plummets."

Increasing the energy efficiency of data centers could provide significant financial savings and pollution reduction benefits. In 2007, Congress realized the importance of this issue when it passed the Energy Independence and Security Act (EISA). Section 453 of the Act focused on improving the energy efficiency of data centers. It required the Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency to jointly establish a voluntary national program to "advance the design and implementation of efficiency technologies" and "produce specifications, measurements, best practices, and benchmarks that will enable data center operators to make more informed decisions about the energy efficiency and costs of data centers."

We request that you provide us with a briefing on and detailed description of your efforts to improve the energy efficiency of data centers, including the status of implementation of section 453 of EISA.

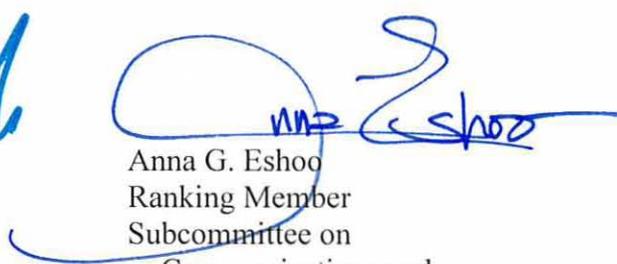
Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member



Bobby L. Rush
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on
Energy and Power



Anna G. Eshoo
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on
Communications and
Technology

³ *Id.*