

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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March 13, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Mr. Stephen Ehikian
Acting Administrator
General Services Administration
1800 F Street, NW
Washington, DC 20405

Dear Secretary Burgum and Acting Administrator Ehikian:

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is conducting oversight focused on the sale of the United States’ Federal Helium System (FHS) to Messer LLC¹—“a domestic subsidiary of the German industrial gas business Messer Group (Messer).”² Messer is tied to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and even touts sending helium produced in the U.S. directly to one of the company’s plants in China.³ Messer’s website states “[o]ur Chinese plant in Wujiang is supplied from a source in the USA.”⁴

On June 27, 2024, the Biden Administration’s Bureau of Land Management (BLM)—a bureau within the U.S. Department of the Interior—announced the sale of the FHS,⁵ which supplies “over 20% of the domestic and 9% of the global demand for helium,”⁶ to Messer LLC.⁷ The Committee seeks to better understand BLM’s and the General Services Administration’s (GSA)—the agencies primarily responsible for the sale—analyses of and perspective regarding the transfer of the helium assets including any analysis of national security concerns associated

¹ Messer Gases for Life, Press Releases, *Messer Completes Acquisition of Federal Helium System from BLM* (June 27, 2024) (last accessed Nov. 4, 2024).

² Christine Hauser, *The U.S. Is Selling Its Helium. Will Balloons and M.R.I.s Be OK?*, N.Y. Times (updated Feb. 5, 2024); Messer Gases for Life, News, *Messer Brings Gases Expertise to Americas, After Messer Group, CVC Close Acquisition* (March 1, 2019) (“On March 1, 2019, Messer Group and CVC Capital Partners Fund VII (CVC) acquired most of the North American gases business of Linde plc [.]”) (last accessed Nov. 4, 2024); Messer Gases for Life, Newsroom Messer SE & Co. KGaA, *Industrial Gases Specialist Messer Completes Acquisition Of Joint Venture Messer Industries – GIC Is New Strategic Partner* (Nov. 14, 2023) (last accessed Nov. 4, 2024).

³ Messer Gases for Life, Newsroom, Messer SE & Co. KGaA, *Do You Have High Standards? So Do We! Specialty Gases From Messer* (last accessed Nov. 4, 2024).

⁴ *Id.* (emphasis added).

⁵ Press Release, U.S. Dep’t of the Interior, Bureau of Land Mgmt., *BLM completes sale of Federal Helium System* (June 27, 2024) [hereinafter “BLM completes sale of FHS”].

⁶ U.S. Dep’t of the Interior, Bureau of Land Mgmt., Energy and Minerals, *Helium, The Federal Helium Program* (The Federal Helium System includes “the Federal Helium Reserve, the Cliffside Field with its wells and gathering system, the 423-mile-long crude helium pipeline, and additional operational assets.”) [hereinafter “The Federal Helium Program”].

⁷ BLM completes sale of FHS, *supra* n. 5.

with the transaction or mitigations put in place. The Committee requests a briefing from BLM and GSA to evaluate the impacts this sale could have on American consumers and businesses, as well as the federal government.

Helium is one of the most essential elements used in everyday life.⁸ Notably, it is a finite resource⁹ produced in just four countries: the United States, Qatar, Algeria, and Russia.¹⁰ BLM described helium as “a critical component in many fields, including scientific research, medical technology, high-tech manufacturing, space exploration and national defense.”¹¹ It is used during space missions,¹² by the semiconductor industry,¹³ and to power magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machines used to diagnose patients with serious medical conditions.¹⁴ For most of these applications, there is no substitute for helium.

The FHS is the world’s largest long-term helium storage facility and has played a critical role in satisfying not only the nation’s helium needs but also the global market. Created by the Helium Act of 1925, the FHS “[] became integral to the federal supply of helium from World War II, through the Cold War, and to the Space Race.”¹⁵ The FHS consists of a vast underground helium storage reservoir known as the Bush Dome,¹⁶ approximately 423 miles of underground pipeline spanning three states, along with natural gas wells and other infrastructure that facilitates the transportation and production of helium.¹⁷ The FHS sale concluded the federal government’s ownership of helium, transferring the U.S. government’s remaining helium assets to a private entity.¹⁸

The Committee is not alone in asking questions about the FHS sale. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration expressed concern, citing national security and supply chain shortages.¹⁹ Private stakeholders in the medical, scientific, and helium industries also warned “[o]ur collective organizations have reviewed the sale as GSA has proposed it, and we believe the sale presents a significant risk of disruption to the helium supply chain, injects needless uncertainty into critical industries, and could have harmful national and economic security implications.”²⁰ Hospital supply chain experts have explained the potential for helium

⁸ The Federal Helium Program, *supra* n. 6.

⁹ Geoff Brumfiel, *The World Is Constantly Running Out of Helium. Here’s Why It Matters.*, NPR (Nov. 8, 2019).

¹⁰ Julia Rosen, *Impending sale of scientifically critical helium sparks worries*, SCIENCE ADVISOR (Nov. 6, 2023).

¹¹ The Federal Helium Program, *supra* n. 6.

¹² *The importance of helium uses in everyday life*, INNOVATION NEWS NETWORK (July 15, 2023) [hereinafter “The importance of helium”].

¹³ *Helium Is Instrumental in Semiconductor Manufacturing*, INST. FOR ENERGY RSCH. (Jan. 11, 2021).

¹⁴ The importance of helium, *supra* n. 12.

¹⁵ Justin B. Edgington, *Bush Dome Reservoir and Cliffside Field Terminal*, TX STATE. HIST. ASS’N (Apr. 3, 2024).

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ The Federal Helium Program, *supra* n. 6.

¹⁸ BLM completes sale of FHS, *supra* n. 5.

¹⁹ Request for Comments on Helium Supply Risk, 88 Fed. Reg. 5904 (U.S. Geological Surv., Dep’t of Interior) (Jan. 23, 2023).

²⁰ Letter from Ashley Thompson, Senior Vice President, Public Policy Analysis and Dev., Am. Hosp. Ass’n, to Tracy Stone-Manning, Dir., Bureau of Land Mgmt. (Aug. 26, 2022); Letter from the Semiconductor Indus. Ass’n,

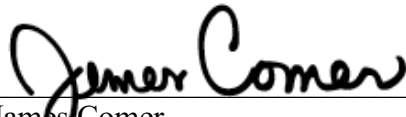
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shortages, stating, “[s]hut[ting] down the U.S. helium reserve would force a situation where we [United States] would have to increase our reliance on foreign sources[.]”²¹

To assist the Committee’s investigation of this matter, the Committee requests a staff level briefing from BLM and GSA as soon as possible but no later than March 20, 2025.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. To schedule the briefing or to ask any related follow up questions, please contact the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Majority staff at (202) 225-5074. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



James Comer
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Gerald Connolly, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

Compressed Nat. Gas Ass’n, Advanced Medical Tech. Ass’n, Aerospace Indus. Ass’n, Medical & Tech. All., to Dr. Lael Brainard, Dir., Nat’l Econ. Couns. (Oct. 17, 2023); Caroline Hopkins, *The U.S. just sold its helium stockpile. Here’s why the medical world is worried.*, NBC News (Jan. 25, 2024) (“[t]he sale of the government’s stockpile of the nonrenewable element could exacerbate an existing supply chain shortage”).

²¹ Caroline Hopkins, *The U.S. just sold its helium stockpile. Here’s why the medical world is worried.*, NBC News (Jan. 25, 2024) (“[t]he sale of the government’s stockpile of the nonrenewable element could exacerbate an existing supply chain shortage”).