

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 14, 2021

The Honorable John Kerry  
Special Presidential Envoy  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Secretary Kerry:

We write to you today to request information about your position as Special Presidential Envoy for Climate. Your cabinet-level position, which includes a place on the National Security Council, appears to have an outsized role within the Biden Administration. It appears that in your role, you have some ability to set foreign policy and to bind the United States to international agreements, despite not being confirmed with advice and consent of the Senate. We are particularly concerned with how you, as the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, may handle an increasingly adversarial U.S. relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC).

You joined the Biden Administration as the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, a newly created position as of January 20, 2021.<sup>1</sup> President Biden said he selected you, in part because you are “one of [his] closest friends . . . .”<sup>2</sup> Your position is apparently distinct from Gina McCarthy’s role as National Climate Advisor<sup>3</sup>—another unconfirmed position that President Biden says “run[s] everything.”<sup>4</sup> It is unclear what the scope of your duties are or how your role plays into the National Security Council, as your mission is a highly nebulous one to simply “combat[] the climate crisis to meet the existential threat that we face.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of State, Biographies, John Kerry: Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, *available at* <https://www.state.gov/biographies/john-kerry/> (last visited May 20, 2021)

<sup>2</sup> White House Briefing Room, *Remarks by President Biden Before Signing Executive Actions on Tackling Climate Change, Creating Jobs, and Restoring Scientific Integrity* (Jan. 27, 2021), *available at* <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/01/27/remarks-by-president-biden-before-signing-executive-actions-on-tackling-climate-change-creating-jobs-and-restoring-scientific-integrity/>.

<sup>3</sup> See White House Briefing Room, *Readout of the Second National Climate Task Force Meeting* (Mar. 18, 2021), *available at* <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/18/readout-of-the-second-national-climate-task-force-meeting/>.

<sup>4</sup> White House Briefing Room, *Remarks by President Biden Before Signing Executive Actions on Tackling Climate Change, Creating Jobs, and Restoring Scientific Integrity* (Jan. 27, 2021), *available at* <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/01/27/remarks-by-president-biden-before-signing-executive-actions-on-tackling-climate-change-creating-jobs-and-restoring-scientific-integrity/>.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

Nevertheless, you appear to be negotiating on behalf of the United States with foreign governments, including the PRC. The Trump Administration made significant strides toward commitments with the PRC to emissions reductions without sacrificing economic prosperity.<sup>6</sup> Yet, the Biden Administration appears poised to make further commitments without regard to economic repercussions, and without a reciprocal agreement from the PRC, the world's largest polluter.<sup>7</sup>

The Biden Administration recently released a joint statement with the PRC,<sup>8</sup> which conveniently fails to bind the PRC to anything in terms of concrete and measurable steps it must take to remedy its environmental degradation. The Biden Administration has set a 2030 greenhouse gas emissions target of 50 to 52 percent below 2005 levels, which will greatly impact the economy of the United States,<sup>9</sup> while it is not clear that the PRC is even attempting to follow suit.

The PRC's own Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng has stated recently that notions of China accelerating carbon reduction targets are "not very realistic" and that "China is at a different stage than the U.S., Western nations and other developed countries."<sup>10</sup> Even as the PRC pretends to cooperate with the international community by pledging to be carbon neutral by 2060, the PRC has not cut its emissions and is actually *increasing* its ability to grow its emissions.<sup>11</sup>

It is of paramount importance that we conduct oversight over your position as the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate and how the position will impact the interests of the United States, especially where the role appears to intersect with the U.S. response to a hostile foreign regime such as the Chinese Communist Party. To date, the White House has failed to provide any information about your security clearance, which Committee Republicans requested on May 4, 2021.<sup>12</sup> This lack of transparency appears to be a pattern of avoiding Congressional oversight

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of State, *United States National Statement at UNFCCC COP25* (Dec. 11, 2019), available at <https://2017-2021.state.gov/united-states-national-statement-at-unfccc-cop25/index.html>.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of State, *China's Environmental Abuses*, available at <https://2017-2021.state.gov/chinas-environmental-abuses/index.html#ChinasOneBeltOneRoadInitiative>. (last accessed May 21, 2021)

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of State, *U.S.-China Joint Statement Addressing the Climate Crisis* (Apr. 17, 2021), available at <https://www.state.gov/u-s-china-joint-statement-addressing-the-climate-crisis/>.

<sup>9</sup> White House Briefing Room, *Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki, Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry, and National Climate Advisor Gina McCarthy* (Apr. 22, 2021), available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2021/04/22/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-jen-psaki-special-presidential-envoy-for-climate-john-kerry-and-national-climate-advisor-gina-mccarthy-april-22-2021/>

<sup>10</sup> *Highlights: An interview with China's vice foreign minister*, Associated Press (Apr. 17, 2021), available at <https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-world-news-china-asia-a53a95d2bc60686f5761bc04c8a8907e>.

<sup>11</sup> Quinn, Jimmy, *Sorry, John Kerry, Cooperation Won't Stop China's Climate Assault*, NATIONAL REVIEW (Apr. 21, 2021), available at <https://www.nationalreview.com/2021/04/sorry-john-kerry-cooperation-wont-stop-chinas-climate-assault/>.

<sup>12</sup> Letter from James Comer, et. al., Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Oversight and Reform, to Dana Remus, Counsel to the President. (May 4, 2021), available at <https://republicans-oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Letter-to-WHCO-Re.-Kerry.pdf>.

while Democrats maintain majorities in the House and Senate.<sup>13</sup> The American people deserve to understand your role in the government and what authority you have to negotiate with foreign adversaries.

To assist us in conducting oversight of these important issues, please provide the Committee with the following information no later than June 28, 2021:

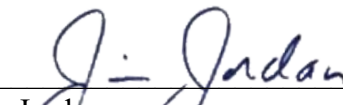
1. All documents and communications regarding the nature and scope of the role of the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate;
2. A detailed explanation of the scope of the role played by the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, the authorities exercised by the incumbent, and why the incumbent would sit on the National Security Council;
3. A detailed explanation of why the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate would have a need to know classified national security information and maintain a security clearance;
4. All documents and communications from January 20, 2021 to the present regarding negotiations between the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate and PRC officials.

To make arrangements to deliver documents or ask any related follow-up questions, please contact Committee on Oversight and Reform Republican Staff at (202) 225-5074. The Committee on Oversight and 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. Thank you for your cooperation with this inquiry.

Sincerely,



James Comer  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Oversight and Reform



Jim Jordan  
Ranking Member  
Committee on the Judiciary

cc: The Honorable Carolyn Maloney, Chairwoman, Committee on Oversight and Reform  
The Honorable Jerrold Nadler, Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary

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<sup>13</sup> See Schultz, Marisa, *John Kerry likely to avoid Iran comments investigation with Republicans in minority in Congress*, FOX NEWS (Apr. 27, 2021), available at <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/john-kerry-likely-avoid-iran-comments-investigation-republican-minority-congress>.