

# LOCALNEWS

## Senator Amy Klobuchar releases propane report

Report: last winter’s propane price spike had significant economic impact on families

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, vice chair of the U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee, Tuesday released a report examining the impact propane price spikes have on the economy.

Last winter the price of propane doubled to more than \$4 per gallon in the Midwest, and remained high for an extended period of time.

The report found that last winter’s price spikes had a major financial impact on families in the Midwest, and Minnesota in particular. Compared with the average amount of money spent on propane during the previous five winters, Midwest families spent \$561 million more in the winter of 2013-14.

“My report confirms what so many Minnesota families and businesses felt firsthand last winter: The propane shortage had significant financial consequences,” said Klobuchar in a news release. “Minnesotans rely heavily on propane to keep warm during the brutally cold winter months. That’s why I worked with Sen. John Thune to pass bipartisan legislation to

help address future shortages, and I will continue to work to make sure this vital energy source is readily available for consumers.”

The report found:

■ Minnesotans spent \$71 million more on propane in the winter of 2013-14 compared to the average of the previous five winters. Only Michigan residents had a bigger increase in the Midwest.

■ 91.7 percent of houses heated with propane in the Midwest are in rural areas, which are unlikely to have access to natural gas distribution systems. Nearly half of households using propane for heating earn less than \$50,000.

■ While only 4.8 percent of U.S. households use propane to heat their homes, 10.2 percent of homes in Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Kansas use it for heating.

Since the propane shortage hit last winter, Klobuchar has taken several steps



Amy Klobuchar

to bring relief to Minnesotans. She passed bipartisan legislation with Thune that was recently signed into law to allow governors greater autonomy to declare emergencies and require the Energy Information Administration to provide early warnings to governors if the inventory of residential heating fuel falls below recent averages.

She also crafted legislation to make it easier to transport propane to communities impacted by the shortage, which was signed into law earlier this year. During the height of the propane crisis, Klobuchar also successfully pushed the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to prioritize propane shipments.

Klobuchar became Senate chair of the Joint Economic Committee at the beginning of the 113th Congress. The JEC is a bicameral Congressional Committee composed of ten members from each of the Senate and the House of Representatives. There are ten Democrats and ten Republicans on the Committee. The main purpose of the JEC, which was established by the Employment Act of 1946, is continually study matters relating to the US

economy. The Committee holds hearings, performs research and advises Members of Congress.

State efforts

Meanwhile last week, Gov. Mark Dayton reconvened stakeholders for discussion on propane supply and demand

The governor’s second propane summit aims to assess supply, mitigate shortages and price hikes

For more than 200,000 households in Minnesota, propane is the primary source of heat. With winter steadily approaching, Dayton discussed the current propane supply and any factors that could impact demand for heating fuel this winter.

After an unprecedented propane shortage last winter, Dayton’s propane summit is a proactive effort to help mitigate propane supply shortages in the winter months ahead, he said in a news release.

“During last winter’s propane shortage, this group worked to ensure the safety of all Minnesotans,” said Dayton, who first convened propane stakeholders and state regulators last January. “Working together in the months ahead, they will

do everything possible to prevent shortages, reduce drastic price increases, and provide all Minnesotans with fuel for the fall harvest and for their winter comfort and safety.”

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, as of Aug. 9, propane supplies in the Midwest were 1.9 million barrels higher than last year, but still 1.6 million barrels below the five-year average. Despite these increased supplies, Governor Dayton has expressed concerns to the federal Surface Transportation Board about the transport of those supplies and farm products to Minnesota residents and businesses given the backlog on the state’s crowded railways.

The governor pledged to continue working in the months ahead with the propane industry, railroad companies, the federal government, Minnesota’s congressional delegation, and neighboring states to ensure Minnesotans who need propane this winter,

have access to it at a reasonable price.

Learning from shortage

Last winter, Minnesota experienced a serious propane shortage that impacted families, businesses, and farms across the state. The shortage resulted in propane rates that were almost four times the normal rate, making propane unaffordable for thousands of Minnesotans during the coldest winter on record in nearly 30 years.

In addition to the weather, a number of factors played a role in the creating a propane shortage, from transportation issues to an unusually wet harvest season, requiring farmers to use large amounts of propane to run heaters that would dry their crops.

Throughout the propane crisis, Dayton and his administration undertook numerous efforts to relieve the shortage, increase the supply of heating fuels in our region and provide financial assistance for Minnesota families.




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