Mr. Stromberg—

It has come to our attention that you plan to write on the Energy Policy Modernization Act of 2016—passed by the Senate April 20—and that you may focus, in part, on a provision in the bill relating to forest bioenergy (biomass).

Our coalition, Biomass101, represents the leading trade associations at every link of the forest products value chain. Our mission is to foster fair, objective, balanced and scientifically grounded press coverage of biomass issues. Since we have identified inaccuracies in previous Washington Post reporting on the subject, and since the editorial board has not at this time reached out to any of our member organizations for discussion of the scientific and policy issues in play, we are taking this opportunity both to present you with our views and to point you to expert sources who can ensure you get a balanced view of the science.

The Senate amendment—authored by Sen. Susan Collins (R., Maine) and supported by Republicans, Democrats, and Independents—recognizes the carbon benefits of renewable biomass and its role in America’s renewable energy future. It was advanced earlier this year from the Committee of Energy and Natural Resources by unanimous voice vote, and then included in the Senate-passed Energy Bill. It directs the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Department of Energy (DOE) to jointly establish a unified federal policy on forest biomass energy. The amendment broadly conforms to a number of core principles to which we are committed:
The carbon benefits of biomass are well established and widely accepted in the peer-reviewed science.

Biomass energy is rightfully considered carbon neutral as long as forest carbon stocks are stable or rising (as they currently are in the U.S.)

The benefits are best understood by looking at the full carbon cycle of release and sequestration, not just at emissions at the moment of combustion.

Forest carbon stocks should be measured on a broad geographic scale using a historical baseline over an appropriate period of time. The scientific consensus recommends a baseline of 100 years for measuring the effects of biomass—the same timeframe that is applied to other energy sources.

Markets for biomass and other forest products stimulate forestland ownership, enabling landowners to maintain healthy forests that capture carbon.

These core principles are in line with a large and growing body of scientific research, and align closely to the fundamentals presented in an open letter to the EPA by the National Association of University Forest Resources Programs (NAUFRP), a group of 100+ forest scientists representing 80 top research universities. The NAUFRP consensus should rightfully be a part in this scientific debate, and we strongly recommend that your board familiarize itself with the group’s scientific fundamentals before writing on the subject.

An abundance of agencies, institutions, legislation, and rules around the world—including guidance from the United Nations (UN) Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and the reporting protocols of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change—have recognized the benefits of energy from biomass. And here’s what our own government reports:

- The EPA, in its Clean Power Plan recognized biomass energy as a fossil fuel alternative that “can play a role in controlling increases of CO₂ levels in the atmosphere.”

- The U.S. Department of State reports, based on EPA USDA analysis, that strong demand for forest products other than timber will increase forest carbon stocks through ongoing landowner investment.

- Regularly collected USDA data show that U.S. timberlands are growing at more than twice the rate of harvests. The total volume of trees in U.S. forests has increased 50 percent in the past 60 years.

- Biomass markets, like other forest products markets, enable private forests to afford forest management that sustains carbon benefits over the long term. EPA data show that carbon storage in U.S. forests offsets 13 percent of total U.S. CO₂ emissions annually.

Unfortunately, when the New York Times editorialized recently on biomass, it omitted the science and U.S. government’s own data, quoting only anti-biomass activist talking.

Biomass101 is a consortium of organizations whose members represent every facet of the forest products industry: from owners of forests both large and small, to wood suppliers, to major manufacturers of wood, pulp, and paper goods you use every day.
points that don’t hold up to scientific scrutiny. (See our open letter in response to the editorial, which counters in detail a number of these talking points).

We welcome dialogue with you to help ensure you deliver to your readers a fair, balanced and scientifically grounded take on biomass and its place in the broader energy bill.

Sincerely

Robert Glowinski
President and CEO, American Wood Council

Donna Harman
President and CEO, American Forest & Paper Association

Deb Hawkinson
President, Forest Resources Association

David P. Tenny
President and CEO, National Alliance of Forest Owners.

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