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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6175

RICHARD M. RUSSELL, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR  
GABRIELLE BATKIN, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

September 8, 2017

President Donald J. Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I write today with concerns about protecting and preparing our communities from the very real threats posed by extreme weather events and climate change.

Climate change is real and a growing threat to all Americans. Just last month, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) released the *State of the Climate* report reflecting the contributions of more than 450 meteorologist scientists from more than 60 countries. The report concluded that global temperatures continue to rise with 2016 being the hottest year recorded; sea levels and ocean temperatures are rising; and there is more carbon dioxide pollution in the atmosphere today than at any time in the past 800,000 years. There is also growing evidence that climate change affects the intensity and frequency of weather events. According to the United States Global Change Research Program, extreme weather events – like wildfires, extreme drought and flooding, and intense storms like Superstorm Sandy and Hurricanes Harvey and Irma have increased in frequency over the past 50 years and, because of climate change, are expected to become even more common, more intense, and more costly.

While our country debates how to address climate change, rising sea levels and extreme weather events are no longer a matter of debate, becoming the new norm and placing extreme burdens on the American people and economy. As seen most recently with Hurricane Harvey, the impacts of extreme weather events are devastating, resulting in lives lost and imposing long-term economic costs. The costs for communities to recover and rebuild from these events are adding up. For Hurricane Harvey alone, the Governor of Texas estimates a cost of up to \$180 billion, which is more than the GDPs of Delaware, Maine and South Dakota combined, and more than the budget for the entire U.S. Navy. NOAA has reported that since 1980, the costs of extreme weather events in the United States has exceeded \$1.2 trillion, and such events costing \$1 billion or more have doubled (on average) in frequency over the past decade. The federal government often ends up paying most of these costs and, unfortunately, states and local communities do not or cannot rebuild in a more resilient way. This means these new investments are at risk in future extreme weather events, costing more lives and taxpayer dollars. For these reasons and more, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has listed climate change as one of the top fiscal risks facing our country.

With a little extra planning – combined with prudent, targeted investments – the federal government can help save lives, livelihoods and taxpayer dollars. That is why I call on you to

direct your Administration to take the following actions to help our states and local communities be better prepared for the very real threats posed by extreme weather events and climate change:

- 1. Reinstate and Fund Agency Actions on Climate Preparedness and Resiliency.** Over the course of his presidency, President Obama signed several Executive Orders that increased U.S. climate preparedness and resiliency. One in particular, *Executive Order 13653, Preparing the United States for the Impacts of Climate Change*, provided tools for American communities to “strengthen their resilience to extreme weather and prepare for other impacts of climate change.” Included were provisions that made it easier for communities hit by extreme weather events to rebuild smarter and stronger to withstand future events, including rebuilding roads and infrastructure to be more climate-resilient, and investing in projects that better protect communities from flooding and their drinking water from contamination. Unfortunately, Executive Order 13653, and other resiliency efforts, were revoked by Executive Order 13783, which was signed and implemented on March 28, 2017. Your proposed FY18 budget would reduce or eliminate funding for climate resiliency efforts across the government. I ask that you reinstate and fund federal actions that ensure our states and local communities have all the tools necessary to prepare and become more resilient against extreme weather events.
- 2. Reinstate the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard.** Executive Order 13690, signed in 2015, provided a flexible framework to establish a new flood risk management standard for federally funded projects. Once implemented, it would mean roads, bridges and other infrastructure built with federal dollars would be done so with climate resiliency in mind. This effort was halted and revoked by your August 15, 2017, Executive Order to streamline the infrastructure permitting process. As we saw with Hurricane Harvey, when flooding impacts our infrastructure it can have devastating and deadly effects. Allowing future infrastructure to be built without doing all we can to prevent or mitigate against similar extreme weather events puts American lives and taxpayer dollars at unnecessary risk. I urge you to reinstate Executive Order 13690 to create a federal flood risk management standard.
- 3. Release the Fourth National Climate Assessment and Extend the Charter for the Advisory Committee for the Sustained National Climate Assessment.** Through the Global Change Research Act of 1990, Congress established the U.S. Global Change Research Program to establish “a comprehensive and integrated United States research program which will assist the Nation and the world to understand, assess, predict, and respond to human-induced and natural processes of global change.” Congress tasked the U.S. Global Change Research Program to release quadrennial reports, called the National Climate Assessments, to provide a scientific review of climate change impacts happening today and trends for the future. These reports are critical for communities to understand the near-term and future risks of climate change. It is our understanding that the National Academy of Sciences has peer-reviewed the fourth National Climate Assessment and agencies have already had a chance to weigh in on the document. I request that the Administration release the report, and reinstate the charter for the Advisory Committee for the Sustained National Climate Assessment, which advises on the development of the quadrennial assessment and whose charter expired on August 20, 2017.

4. **Hold a Red Team/Blue Team Exercise on Climate Preparedness, Not on Climate Science.** For over 50 years, the Department of Defense has used red teaming exercises to assess our military's structural and operational vulnerabilities. More recently, other government agencies, such as the Department of Homeland Security have used such exercises to assess cyber network vulnerabilities. Instead of using a red team/blue team exercise to reassess internationally peer-reviewed climate science as some in the Administration would like to do, these types of exercises should be used to assess our nation's structural vulnerabilities to the expected impacts of climate change. This information could better inform the type, amount and targeting of resiliency investments that need to be made in any future infrastructure funding packages.

These are a few examples of actions the federal government can take today to make our communities safer for tomorrow. The recent events in Houston and the impending impacts from Hurricane Irma are reminders that our country can no longer delay. We must better prepare our communities, making them more resilient in the face of a new climate reality. I stand ready to work with you and your Administration to address these issues.

With best personal regards, I am,

Sincerely yours,



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Tom Carper  
Ranking Member