

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer:

The Sierra Club and our 3.8 million members and supporters strongly encourage efforts to mitigate the economic impact COVID-19 will have on families, communities, workers, small businesses, and organizations across the country--particularly on those whose livelihoods are most vulnerable.

The Sierra Club commends the House for passing the Family First Coronavirus Response Act, H.R. 6201. The provisions in H.R. 6201 will help protect families and frontline communities as they navigate this crisis. We applaud the inclusion of funding provisions to increase medical coverage, lift barriers to testing, expand nutrition programs for families facing food insecurity, enhance employment insurance, and protect seniors and caregivers. Additional provisions for emergency rental and eviction-prevention assistance, financial assistance for those currently un-housed, as well as housing-assistance providers will grant much-needed support.

With Senate passage today of this broad relief package, attention shifts to an economic stimulus package. Sierra Club urges consideration of the following policy priorities below and also urges the Senate to avoid pitfalls, including fossil fuel bailouts, in any economic stimulus package.

Invest in Workers

Economic relief to industries must center the needs of all workers. This includes providing employees and independent contractors full access to emergency relief. A federal response must ensure families have the economic means to endure this public health crisis, including providing money directly to workers, contractors and subcontractors. Any assistance to specific industries should be conditioned on compliance with high-road labor standards, including payment of prevailing wages, use of project labor agreements, adoption of a neutrality policy with regard to union collective bargaining, and adoption of a "ban the box" hiring policy to ensure fair employment opportunities for all.

Protect Clean Energy, Clean Transportation, and Clean Economy Jobs

During this emergency, specific attention should be paid to the emergent, yet vulnerable, clean energy industry. The clean energy industry faces the same stresses as the travel, restaurant, sports, and entertainment industries, with a new reality of forced closures and layoffs. Roughly 3.3 million Americans work in the solar, wind, electric vehicle, energy storage, energy efficiency, and other renewable energy industries, many in small and medium-sized businesses. Many of the people in these jobs will be harmed as a result of the economic fallout from COVID-19. Further, their health and work are inextricably linked to the success and progress our country has been making on lowering greenhouse gas emissions and addressing the climate crisis. The clean energy sector must be prioritized as you work on additional government stimulus. We ask that you include a robust package of critical clean energy tax incentives in any forthcoming stimulus package.

No Fossil Fuel Bailouts

Whether in the form of low-interest loans, purchases into the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, royalty relief, or new tax subsidies, no additional giveaways to polluters should be included in any stimulus package. The fossil fuel industry is already heavily subsidized by the federal government. In 2017, researchers showed that about half of the profits enjoyed by the oil and gas industry were derived from tax and royalty subsidies. For the sake of our climate and communities, the stimulus package must not include a bailout or payments to the fossil fuel industry. Instead of propping up some of the world's largest fossil fuel corporations, the economic stimulus package should focus on protections for frontline workers and communities.

Make A Down Payment On A Regenerative Economy

While we urgently need a large, short-term stimulus to protect the health and economic security of those on the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis, it is imperative that policymakers also plan for a large, medium-term stimulus to counteract the economic downturn and ensure a just recovery. This stimulus should create millions of good, family-sustaining jobs with high-road labor standards; counter systemic inequities by directing investments to the working families, communities of color, and Indigenous communities who face the most economic insecurity; and tackle the climate crisis that is compounding threats to our economy and health. All three goals can be achieved simultaneously with public investments to rebuild our infrastructure, replace lead pipes, expand wind and solar power, build clean and affordable public transit, weatherize our buildings, build and repair public housing, manufacture more clean energy goods, restore our wetlands and forests, expand public services that support climate resilience, and support regenerative agriculture led by family farmers.

Protect Democracy

It is imperative for federal and state governments to do what they can to protect and enhance our democracy during this trying time. We encourage Congress to ensure states have adequate

funding to increase access to the ballot box regardless of where a voter lives or their ability. This should include proper funding, staffing, printing, and infrastructure cost to ensure that states can adequately run proper elections now in the primary elections and in the general election this fall. This should also include additional registration efforts, online voter registration, early in-person voting, and the inclusion of vote-by-mail and no-excuse absentee voting.. States should have emergency contingency plans that include the measures outlined above to ensure voting is accessible even in the midst of a pandemic. We must not allow our very democracy to be unraveled by such a dangerous disease.

Thank you for your consideration. The Sierra Club looks forward to working with Congress to pass legislation that helps our nation fight the coronavirus, and a stimulus package that helps families and communities deal with the economic disruptions caused by COVID-19 while building a future that puts families first, stabilizes our climate and ends special treatment for the fossil fuel industry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael Brune".

Michael Brune
Executive Director
Sierra Club