

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 20, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader Schumer,

Thank you for your leadership and steadfast commitment to combating climate change, investing in clean energy, and protecting our environment, especially as the country faced extraordinary and devastating circumstances over the course of the last year.

The United States experienced 22 billion-dollar weather and climate disasters in 2020, shattering the previous annual record of 16 events. 2020 was the worst fire season on record, burning over 10.2 million acres and costing over \$16 billion in damages and \$3 billion in suppression costs. The U.S. experienced a record-breaking 30 named tropical cyclones, 7 of which became billion-dollar disasters—also a new record.¹ Nearly half of the U.S. has been in a drought since 2021 began, amplified by dangerous heatwaves with record breaking temperatures. Climate disasters continue to increase in number and strength.

At the intersection of the COVID-19 pandemic unemployment crisis and the impacts of a warming climate, we have a historic opportunity to make bold investments in our public lands, clean energy, and climate resiliency, all while creating good-paying jobs, building a diverse workforce, and strengthening career pathways. It is in the spirit of this conviction and dedication that **we write to express our strong support for funding a Civilian Climate Corps in the upcoming reconciliation package.**

President Biden recognized the potential of a Civilian Climate Corps through its inclusion in the American Jobs Plan and the FY2022 budget. **Congress must ensure these bold plans are brought to fruition by passing ambitious legislation that harnesses the enthusiasm Americans feel for the Civilian Climate Corps.** Half of all voters under 45 say they would consider joining the Civilian Climate Corps if a position was available to them. A renewed Civilian Climate Corps would provide unprecedented economic opportunities to young Americans who are unemployed at nearly double the rate of the total population. President Biden highlighted this in his January 27, 2021 Executive Order². We agree that it is time to “put a new generation of Americans to work conserving our public lands and waters” among other pressing climate priorities to decarbonize our economy, provide essential updates to the nation’s infrastructure, and create more resilient communities. **In addition to the strong support from President Biden, we are encouraged by discussions of transformative investments in the Civilian Climate Corps for the coming budget resolution.**

¹ <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/blogs/beyond-data/2020-us-billion-dollar-weather-and-climate-disasters-historical>

² <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/>

The urgency of this moment recalls past chapters of national mobilization. More than eighty years ago, we rose to the challenge of the Great Depression with the creation of programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration. Responding to the call of Great Society priorities and the advocacy of leaders like Senator Ted Kennedy, Congress acted to preserve those initiatives' legacy in a suite of national service and youth engagement programs, the largest of which is AmeriCorps. In each new iteration, Congress worked to address the inequities that marked the New Deal initiatives. Today's programs include both opportunities for a residential, team-based experience modeled on the twentieth-century Civilian Conservation Corps and partnerships with nonprofit and community-based organizations. **In standing up the Civilian Climate Corps, we will build on that legacy and existing infrastructure, provide robust economic and educational opportunity, and promote inclusive and equitable Corps.**

GOALS OF THE PROGRAM: The Civilian Climate Corps program goals are to provide employment opportunities; invest in natural climate solutions, clean energy, and resilience; and address environmental justice through locally-led, science-based projects.

- **The Civilian Climate Corps will put people back to work, train a new workforce for long term careers, and support local economies.** After historic levels of job loss due to COVID-19, this bold investment in jobs is a bipartisan priority. Recent polling shows that 77% of likely voters support the concept of a Civilian Climate Corps, including 65% of Republicans and 87% of Democrats.³ From rural communities to urban centers, the Civilian Climate Corps will provide new career opportunities across the country. Additionally, the projects completed by the Corps will improve and support the local economies of the communities they are located in.
- **The Civilian Climate Corps will invest in natural climate solutions,** including conserving public lands and waters, investing in coastal restoration, expanding regenerative agriculture, and increasing natural carbon sequestration. The National Park Service currently struggles with a nearly \$12 billion maintenance backlog, and the work done by the Corps will help ensure our public lands remain healthy, supporting strong ecosystems and biodiversity.
- **The Civilian Climate Corps will reduce carbon emissions** by investing in a clean energy economy. From installing renewable energy infrastructure, to improving energy efficiency, to providing training for clean energy jobs, the Corps will support the transition to a clean, competitive energy economy. These investments are integral to achieving President Biden's goal of achieving net-zero global greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.
- **The Civilian Climate Corps will invest in climate resilience projects,** including flood and wildfire mitigation and preparedness, drought management, addressing invasive species, and rebuilding communities after climate disasters. The Corps will play an important role in supporting communities experiencing these impacts firsthand. Projects will be ecologically and scientifically appropriate, and benefit our climate, public lands, and communities.

³ <https://www.filesforprogress.org/memos/clean-energy-enjoys-bipartisan-support.pdf>

- **The Civilian Climate Corps will prioritize Environmental Justice.** Work done by the Corps will help address historic inequities, from improving access to public lands and waters for disenfranchised communities, to reducing air pollution by supporting the transition to renewable energy, to providing job training and career guidance to communities that are most in need. The work completed must also receive community feedback to ensure the communities impacted will benefit.

STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAM: A central entity within the White House should coordinate and oversee the work of Civilian Climate Corps and its public and private partners. In the coming reconciliation package, we urge you to include funding for programs across the federal government at levels necessary to meet the scale of the climate challenge.

- **We agree with President Biden’s assertion that the existential threat of climate change requires a whole-of-government approach.** As further highlighted in Section 215 of President Biden’s Executive Order, Americans support a Civilian Climate Corps that makes bold investments to “conserve and restore public lands and waters, bolster community resilience, increase reforestation, increase carbon sequestration in the agricultural sector, protect biodiversity, improve access to recreation, and address the changing climate.” Additionally, the Corps must address energy efficiency, renewable energy, weatherization, education, environmental justice, disaster preparedness and mitigation, and other climate issues. These ambitious goals demand a coordinated and organized approach.
- **We support the creation of a central entity within the Executive Office of the President to coordinate and oversee the work of the Corps.** Through this central coordination, the Civilian Climate Corps will have a unique identity within the federal government that includes uniform branding, mission, and purpose, even as multiple federal, state, and local programs are involved in administration. This identity should also be integrated with that of the existing service infrastructure. This model will ensure that the Civilian Climate Corps builds on the already existing and successful infrastructure of its many partners and highlight the diversity of ways in which Americans can get to work meeting the urgent needs of their communities.
- **The program should include funding for enlisting Americans at scale, including through the infrastructure at AmeriCorps, non-profit, state, local, and agency partners.** More than 300,000 Americans work through programs funded by AmeriCorps, formally known as the Corporation for National and Community Service, to address critical community needs, including Civilian Climate Corps activities like conservation, habitat restoration, and environmental education. There is also strong existing network of partners, including outdoor recreation groups, park and refuge friends’ groups, conservation groups, trail organizations, and many more whose local knowledge and expertise can expand program impact and make efforts more successful. Robust funding should also extend to Department of Labor programs to strengthen the workforce development capacity of the Corps. A re-envisioned Corps must support the entire ecosystem of partners engaged in this work.

- **The program should include robust funding for the many programs and activities in which Corps members will engage.** These include initiatives and accounts at the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, Education, Energy, Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Health and Human Services, as well as the Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and others. These programs are foundational to the work of the Corps, from funding forest restoration projects, to supporting conservation practices on farms, to ensuring clean water for communities. Increasing climate extremes are exacerbating existing challenges. The Civilian Climate Corps will provide the needed workforce for federal programs to fulfil their full potential in supporting communities and mitigating climate impacts.
- **The Civilian Climate Corps should coordinate with other AmeriCorps, national service, and public programs to provide integrated services.** Climate change threatens enormous collateral consequences for our efforts to combat nutrition insecurity, promote public health, and prevent and address damage from natural disasters. The breadth of this challenge requires a holistic response, and the Corps should be designed to provide integrated services and activities where appropriate.

STANDARDS OF THE PROGRAM: We urge you to include legislation in the reconciliation package to ensure the Civilian Climate Corps includes strong labor standards and clear career pathways. The program must also prioritize frontline communities and locally-led operations.

- **In addition to a whole-of-government approach, the Civilian Climate Corps must have ambitious labor standards.** For the workforce to be equitable, the program must provide a living wage and a robust education award to offset the cost of college or pay down student loans. The Civilian Climate Corps must ensure members do not need to rely on other income or public benefits to survive, and should establish partnerships with industry partners, unions, community colleges, trade schools, universities, and other postsecondary education programs to establish educational opportunity pipelines. Further, the program should provide benefits to include full healthcare coverage and support for childcare, housing, transportation, and education. Further, these benefits should be extended on an equal basis to all members participating in national service programs, so that Americans providing critical public health, nutrition, education, and other services may also benefit from the same economic, educational, and career pathway opportunities.
- **In addition to strong labor standards, the Civilian Climate Corps must provide a pathway to good jobs, and especially union jobs.** Participation in the program will provide Corps members with the education and training to succeed in the future workforce and aid them in establishing their careers. Corps programs that offer pre-apprenticeship and registered apprenticeship opportunities and job placement assistance programs must be prioritized. The Civilian Climate Corps should also provide non-competitive hiring authority for all Corps members with federal partners.
- **The new Civilian Climate Corps must improve upon the original program by prioritizing environmental justice and investing in an equitable and diverse Corps membership.** The program must include investments in and recruitment from frontline environmental justice communities, by directing 50% of Corps investments into, and

recruiting 50% of Corps members from, frontline environmental justice communities. The program must maintain close coordination with Tribal communities and ensure specific funding is allocated for participants from Tribal communities. The program should also center justice in recruitment and retention by ensuring gender equity, providing opportunities to a range of ages, and enabling participation regardless of immigration status to include DACA recipients, DED and TPS holders, refugees and asylees. Finally, the program must engage veterans and out-of-school or out-of-work youth and formerly incarcerated persons.

- **Although national coordination is necessary, the Civilian Climate Corps must follow the lead of local communities in day-to-day operations.** The Civilian Climate Corps should look to impactful public-private partnerships and locally administered programs as models. Projects should focus on locally-designed climate solutions that meet the needs of local communities. Additionally, the program should prioritize local hiring to ensure Corps members can live and work near their communities.

The intersection of climate impacts and COVID-19 have resulted in unique economic, racial, and public health challenges facing the United States. Congress has an opportunity to pass bold legislation to create jobs, combat climate change, and prepare America for the future.

There are several pieces of legislation that have been introduced in the 117th Congress signaling strong support for a Civilian Climate Corps. **While each of these bills vary in detail, we collectively ask that the upcoming reconciliation package include text that supports and funds a Civilian Climate Corps program as outlined in this letter.**

Thank you for your dedication to bold climate action, and we look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



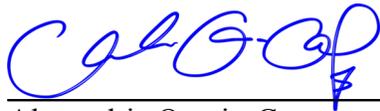
Ron Wyden
United States Senator



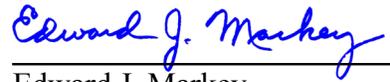
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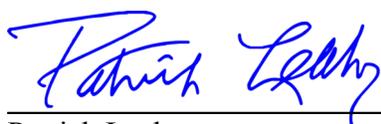
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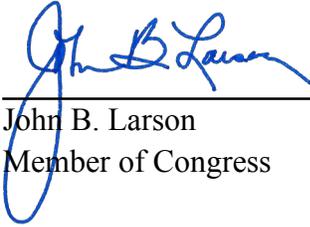
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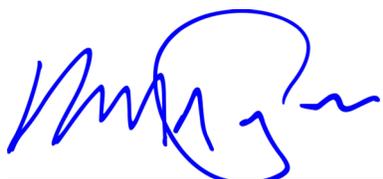
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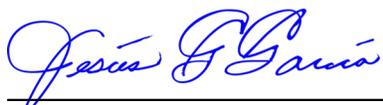
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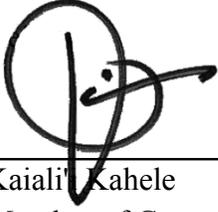
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