

# Congress of the United States

## Washington, DC 20515

January 26, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Vice President Kamala Harris  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden and Vice President Harris,

Congratulations on your election and inauguration; we are celebrating with you!

As the leaders the House Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition (SEEC)—a nearly 70-member coalition focused on advancing sustainable energy and environmental policy across the Congressional agenda—we were heartened by the climate and justice-focused leadership you demonstrated during your campaign. Like you, we know that the country is facing interconnected crises—health, economic, racial, and climate—and like you, we believe we can help address them all by building back better as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. This recovery will be our opportunity to justly and equitably rebuild and spur prosperity for decades to come. Central to this mission will be developing a recovery plan that addresses climate change—employing both investments *and* standards to put us on a path to zero-emissions, while creating millions of high-quality jobs and investing in frontline communities disproportionately burdened by pollution.

As your team works to set up a course of action for a national recovery, we urge you to use the full weight of the White House to advance just climate investments and standards in Congress wherever possible and via executive authority.

**1) Our fiscal stimulus must include climate-smart investments and standards.** We must direct funding towards projects and investments that create quality, family-sustaining jobs while reducing emissions and increasing our resilience. This should include critical investments in clean energy, infrastructure, and manufacturing. We encourage you to do this as much as possible across the executive branch, and the Members of SEEC stand ready to work with you to authorize and appropriate more climate-smart funding and to advance just climate policies in Congress. In addition to investments, our recovery policies must include standards. More than a decade ago, the Obama-Biden administration succeeded, with the support of our coalition and Democratic leadership, in securing important recovery funds for clean energy in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. But we fell short in passing lasting standards, and unfortunately, we saw the standards created by the Obama-Biden administration rolled back under the Trump administration. We need just climate standards in order to meet our decarbonization goals in time to save the planet. And importantly, federal standards that move us towards a zero-carbon economy will help create more jobs—fostering a long-term recovery and moving America ahead in the global race to be a leader in clean energy innovation. We urge

you to seek standards legislatively wherever possible and via executive authority where necessary.

2) **Policies to address climate change must be immediate.** There is no time left to delay action on climate change. The planet is ringing all the alarm bells it has: from fires ravaging the West, to hurricanes bombarding the Gulf, to record ice melt at the poles. Nothing short of a safe and livable planet for our children and our children's children is at stake.

3) **Our policies must be just and equitable.** Like you, we believe we have a historic opportunity and responsibility to correct long-standing racial and economic injustices. We know that climate change is disproportionately impacting low-income communities, communities of color, and Tribal and Indigenous communities, and that it will continue to hurt these same communities first and worst. We also know that Black and Brown communities, Tribal and Indigenous communities, lower-wealth neighborhoods, and other underserved communities have long suffered disproportionately from the cumulative impacts of pollution. Like you, we support policies that prioritize funding and include long-neglected protections for environmental justice communities, and critically important, we support early and meaningful consultation and continued engagement with these communities in policy development. We also agree that we must prioritize policies to help us address decades of increasing income inequality that are eroding our democracy and our middle class. We can and must ensure that we are creating good jobs by working directly with labor union partners and working Americans to draft policies that will ensure the creation of family-sustaining jobs, wage growth, and critical labor protections. Equally important, we must also work directly with those in deindustrialized communities and energy sector workers who have experienced job loss to ensure support for workers, their families, and their communities. Finally, our work must also ensure polluter accountability. For too long, energy companies have received federal subsidies while the cost of their pollution has been born by the rest of us, and most acutely by frontline communities. We need a new policy paradigm that ends fossil fuel subsidies, puts in place stronger pollution limits, and requires companies to take responsibility for their pollution.

Science tells us that the narrow window of opportunity to protect the planet is closing fast, and the American people are demanding that we save the planet before it is too late. We saw climate change featured in this election unlike any other before it. It was a centerpiece of the debates and your campaign, with your climate proposal being the boldest ever put forward by a presidential ticket. The past four years have seen record levels of engagement on climate change from companies, states, and the American public. And most importantly, we have heard the resounding voices of America's youth and young people across the globe boldly demanding that the planet be protected for their futures as it was for ours. The clear laggard has been the federal government, which must now take its place as a leader in addressing the climate crisis if we are going to protect the planet.

This moment is unlike any other. We need the full weight of the White House behind this priority, and our coalition stands ready to work with you in seizing it for the betterment of all humanity.

Sincerely,

A. Donald McEachin

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Rep. A. Donald McEachin  
SEEC Vice-Chair

Gerald E. Connolly

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Rep. Gerald E. Connolly  
SEEC Co-Chair

Doris Matsui

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Rep. Doris Matsui  
SEEC Co-Chair

Paul Tonko

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Rep. Paul Tonko  
SEEC Co-Chair

Alan Lowenthal

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Rep. Alan S. Lowenthal  
SEEC Vice-Chair

Mike Quigley

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Rep. Mike Quigley  
SEEC Vice-Chair

Matthew A. Cartwright

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Rep. Matt Cartwright  
SEEC Vice-Chair

Chellie Pingree

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Rep. Chellie Pingree  
SEEC Vice-Chair

## SEEC Priorities for Executive Action

Our coalition stands ready to work with you to advance important climate standards and investments in Congress. Equally important, however, we urge your administration to take urgently needed action via executive authority—using every tool at your disposal to protect communities from climate change and weaving environmental and economic justice throughout all your administration’s work. We know you have already received numerous good ideas from experts across the country, and we applaud the immediate actions you have already taken. Outlined below are some of the critical steps we support your administration taking right away to address the climate crisis, serve environmental and economic justice, and reduce pollution that exacerbates the dangerous impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. To be clear, we do not consider this a comprehensive list of needed actions, and we look forward to working with your administration in identifying and supporting critical policies.

### **Governance:**

- Establish robust coordination between White House climate leaders and climate task forces across federal agencies in order to institute coordinated, climate-focused policies across federal agencies.
- Establish a whole-of-government approach to mobilizing federal investments that maintains your campaign promise to ensure environmental justice (EJ) communities receive 40% of investments in our clean energy recovery ; ensure that the process for targeting those resources is transparent and includes accountability measures.
- Modify agencies’ missions to make action to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) pollution, advance environmental and economic justice, and increase resilience a priority for every agency.
- At the Department of Energy (DOE) specifically, modernize agency programs to enable greater progress in addressing the climate crisis; in addition to updating DOE’s mission to explicitly include mitigating climate change and increasing climate resilience, use available authority to accelerate technology transfer, demonstration, and deployment of clean energy resources; increase support for workforce development and quality job creation, especially efforts to support underserved communities; and target more resources toward difficult-to-decarbonize sectors.
- Establish and maintain clear scientific integrity principles across agencies to ensure that policies are science-based and not distorted by political interest.
- Develop federal government procurement policies and standards that “Buy Clean” and incentivize the utilization of low-carbon materials in federal infrastructure projects while helping to create family-sustaining domestic manufacturing jobs.

## **Transportation:**

- Develop fuel efficiency and GHG emission standards for light-duty vehicles that set us on a path to transition to zero-emission vehicles (ZEV).
- Develop a transportation-network GHG emission reduction standard for states and metropolitan planning organizations (if Congress cannot pass policies outlined in [H.R. 2](#), the Moving Forward Act, from the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress).
- Increase DOE and Department of Transportation focus on ZEV infrastructure build-out by increasing community support for planning, installing, and operating such infrastructure. These federal agencies can help bring stakeholders together and provide much needed technical assistance in planning, installation, and operation.
- Prioritize federal spending to accelerate the transition to zero-emissions school and transit buses.
- Increase focus on research, development, and deployment for heavy-duty ZEVs, as well as hard-to-decarbonize transportation sectors like aviation and shipping.

## **Power:**

- Use existing Clean Air Act authority to regulate GHG pollution in the power sector.
- Focus federal resources on a thoughtful and expeditious expansion of transmission capacity to better distribute renewable energy across the country.
- Focus federal resources on advancing the research, development, and commercialization of short-term and long-term storage technologies.
- Re-launch DOE's Better Communities Alliance to give local communities better access to DOE resources and to promote community-driven clean energy development.
- Establish an energy justice and democracy program at DOE to support just and equitable access to energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies, community energy planning, and energy resilience.
- Establish a cross-agency Offshore Wind Task Force with representatives from key federal agencies, including the Department of Interior (DOI), DOE, and Department of Commerce, to develop an updated National Offshore Wind Strategy to spur development. This should include a strategy to develop a robust domestic supply chain and recommendations to support the build-out of training programs, rooted in union apprenticeship and training programs, that offer opportunities for under-served communities and workers impacted by the transition to clean energy.

## **Buildings:**

- Increase research and development focus on zero-emission heating and cooling and spur adoption of mature technologies across federal buildings.
- Set us on a path to a zero-emission federal building stock. Retrofit federal buildings and public housing stock to be more efficient and eliminate GHG and other pollution. Replace natural-gas stoves in public housing with non-gas alternatives and address other indoor pollution exposure during retrofits.

## **Industry:**

- Establish a comprehensive National Manufacturing Strategy to strengthen and rebuild domestic manufacturing in a manner that advances clean energy technology manufacturing, reduces industrial pollution, and promotes high-road procurement, and labor and equity policies.
- Refocus existing manufacturing programs to go beyond energy efficiency changes to more focused GHG reduction, with a particular focus on demonstration and commercialization of new technologies and processes.
- Increase focus on developing and deploying no or low-emission industrial processes and zero-emission energy resources for high-heat needs.

## **Forests, Agriculture & Oceans:**

- Create a carbon bank within the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to pay farmers for sequestering carbon in their soils. Make GHG reduction and climate resilience a top priority for existing USDA conservation, research, and extension programs.
- Wherever possible under executive authority, use science-based decision-making to protect 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by the year 2030.
- Restore and enhance blue carbon ecosystems that serve as natural carbon sinks and resiliency buffers.
- Prohibit new offshore oil and gas leasing and establish a national goal for offshore wind development.
- Build on DOI's Smart from the Start program by initiating stakeholder and intergovernmental processes to identify ideal offshore wind siting areas while ensuring the highest protections for wildlife and the environment.

## **Justice and Health:**

- Establish an Environmental Justice Advisory Council filled with EJ leaders and representatives of frontline communities to advise on principles for community engagement and frontline community investments; establish principles of community engagement for all agencies to follow.
- Revitalize the Environmental Justice Interagency Working Group and instruct them to develop a framework for addressing the cumulative impacts of pollution, which would also result in emissions reduction.
- Update and strengthen Executive Order (EO) 12898, “Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations,” and ensure accountability and implementation of EO 12898.
- Improve EJScreen, including adding more indicators like pollution burden, exposure to pollution, and health and socioeconomic factors, or create a new screening and equity tool that can be used across federal agencies to identify communities that have faced the greatest environmental impacts and structural inequities, and direct resources to remedy those harms.
- Reinvigorate and strengthen the National Environmental Policy Act.
- Update the national ambient air quality standards (NAAQS) for ozone and particulate matter.
- Repeal the Trump administration’s Chemical Disaster Rule rollback and strengthen standards to better protect workers, first responders, and fenceline communities from chemical disasters. Including strengthening the Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s Process Safety Management Standard.
- Revoke the Trump administration’s Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS) determination and strengthen these important air standards.
- Repeal the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Waste Prevention rollback and the EPA Methane Pollution Standard rollback and set strong standards for methane emissions from new and existing sources in the oil and gas sector.