



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Barragán, McEachin, and Jayapal Urge Mitch Landrieu to Prioritize Environmental Justice Implementation in Infrastructure Bill

Letter from Co-Chairs of the United for Climate and Environmental Justice Task Force Highlights Importance of Meeting Justice40 Commitments

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Representatives Nanette Diaz Barragán, Donald McEachin, and Pramila Jayapal, the Co-Chairs of the United for Climate and Environmental Justice Task Force, led a letter to White House advisor Mitch Landrieu urging the administration to fulfill the goals of the Justice40 Initiative and prioritize environmental justice when implementing the Infrastructure, Investment, and Jobs Act (IIJA). Landrieu is the administration’s Senior Advisor and Infrastructure Implementation Coordinator, leading the implementation of the infrastructure law.

There is tremendous potential for the infrastructure bill’s investments to reduce environmental and public health disparities in low-income communities and communities of color. However, there are also historic challenges to overcome to make sure disadvantaged communities have the necessary support to compete for grant funds, and to avoid or minimize negative environmental impacts in the implementation of some programs.

“When initiating projects with funds from the IIJA, we ask that you consider if projects are “shovel-worthy” in their ability to fight climate change instead of asking whether projects are simply “shovel-ready.” We wish to partner with you to reduce barriers to environmental justice communities accessing funding from the infrastructure bill, and to ensure these funds are used to maximize climate and environmental benefits, while avoiding harms,” the members of Congress wrote.

In the letter, the members request the administration consider following several principles when implementing the bill, including but not limited to the prioritization of proposed projects that advance climate and environmental justice goals, increased technical assistance for underserved communities applying for grants, and the use of the environmental justice screening and mapping

tool developed by the administration as part of the Justice40 Initiative to inform the distribution of IJJA funds.

A PDF of the letter is linked here and full text is below.

January 25, 2022

Mitch Landrieu
Senior Advisor and Infrastructure Implementation Coordinator
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Landrieu:

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) is an unprecedented opportunity to ensure environmental justice communities are front of the line for hundreds of billions of dollars of investment to support climate resilience, mass transit, clean energy, and environmental remediation. As the co-chairs of the House United for Climate and Environmental Justice Task Force, we write to urge you to fulfill the goals of the Justice40 Initiative and prioritize environmental justice when implementing the IIJA.

Historically, these communities have been left behind, and often lack the capacity to pursue federal funding for projects to improve their quality of life. For example, the IIJA provides \$6.8 billion¹ to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to address climate change through mitigation projects, but FEMA's existing climate mitigation and disaster relief programs have been criticized as failing to deliver assistance to communities with the greatest need². Further, households with income as high as \$150,000 a year could be prioritized for flood mitigation funding from the IIJA³.

It's also critical for the administration to maximize the environmental and climate benefits of infrastructure funds that could mitigate or perpetuate the climate crisis and environmental inequities, depending on how they are implemented. For example, funding for the Ports Infrastructure Development Program (PIDP) should include criteria for project proposals that address the climate and environmental justice impacts of ports, consistent with the program's

¹ Federal Emergency Management Agency, "Infrastructure Deal Provides FEMA Billions for Community Mitigation Investments" (November, 2021) <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20211115/infrastructure-deal-provides-fema-billions-community-mitigation-investments>

² ClimateWire, "'Fundamentally broken': Advocates blame FEMA aid programs" (November, 2021) <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2021/11/22/fundamentally-broken-advocates-slam-fema-aid-programs-283487>

³ ClimateWire, "Half the U.S. would qualify for flood program aimed at poor" (November, 2021) <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2021/11/18/half-the-us-would-qualify-for-flood-program-aimed-at-poor-283315>

updated FY 2021 priorities⁴. The Department of Energy (DOE) funding for regional hydrogen hubs should prioritize green hydrogen produced by 100% clean energy electrolysis, rather than hydrogen produced from fossil fuels that pollute communities. When initiating projects with funds from the IJJA, we ask that you consider if projects are “shovel-worthy” in their ability to fight climate change instead of asking whether projects are simply “shovel-ready.”

We wish to partner with you to reduce barriers to environmental justice communities accessing funding from the infrastructure bill, and to ensure these funds are used to maximize climate and environmental benefits, while avoiding harms. To that end, we respectfully request that you consider the following principles when implementing this possibly transformational bill:

- Consideration of the benefits to underserved communities in scoring and rubrics for competitive grants.
- Ensure that National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) rules are followed, with an emphasis on equitable public engagement on proposed infrastructure projects. Equitable public engagement is critical to ensuring environmental justice voices are heard and include but are not limited to public comment periods of at least 90 days, translation of materials for multi-lingual communities, and hybrid engagement opportunities.
- Increased federal technical assistance for underserved communities applying for grants.
- Application of the Justice40 Initiative by the administration and agencies responsible for distributing funds from IJJA.
- Prioritization of proposed projects that advance climate and environmental justice goals.
- Strict provisions to prohibit approval of federal funds for proposed projects that pollute environmental justice communities or increase greenhouse gas emissions.
- Use of the environmental justice screening and mapping tool developed by the administration as part of the Justice40 Initiative to inform the distribution of IJJA funds.
- Creation of an Equity Advisory Board for the Infrastructure Implementation Task Force including members from frontline organizations working to increase racial and climate equity and members of the underserved communities who are in most need of these infrastructure investments.
- Incorporation of climate resilience measures in implementation through creation of an overarching climate resilience plan for implementation and consideration of climate resilience in each project funded by this bill.

We look forward to receiving your reply as soon as possible. We stand ready to work with you to achieve the important goals of equitably distributing IJJA funds, protecting public health, and advancing environmental and climate justice.

SIGNATORIES

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⁴ US DOT Maritime Administration, “FAQ – Port Infrastructure Development Grants” (May, 2021) <https://www.maritime.dot.gov/PIDP%20Grants/FAQs>

Nanette Diaz Barragán is proud to represent California's 44th Congressional District, which includes the communities of Carson, Compton, Florence-Firestone, Lynwood, North Long Beach, Rancho Dominguez, San Pedro, South Gate, Walnut Park, Watts, Willowbrook and Wilmington. She serves as chairwoman of the House Homeland Security Committee's Subcommittee on Border Security.