

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

October 12, 2021

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

Dear Mr. President:

Thank you for your leadership in addressing the climate crisis – I am encouraged by your administration's bold response to this generational challenge through the Build Back Better plan. I fully support a whole-of-government approach toward tackling greenhouse emissions, investing in underserved communities, and coming to the aid of Americans already facing climate impacts.

However, I am concerned that a series of critical climate provisions may be left on the negotiating table. While investing in clean energy and transportation are essential pillars of addressing the climate crisis, investing in mitigation, resiliency, and nature-based solutions are equally important and should be treated as such.

The final Build Back Better bill must invest in wildfire, drought, and sea-level rise mitigation; support nature-based carbon sequestration and resilient ecosystems; and take meaningful steps to get the United States taxpayer out of the fossil fuel business. Failing to consider these provisions as essential climate investments would mean failing to meet the scope of this crisis or the needs of American communities.

With significant jurisdiction over western water and drought, federal lands and wildfires, oceans and coasts, and fossil fuel extraction on federal lands, the House Natural Resources Committee (HNRC) is at the center of climate issues facing the United States. Despite a relatively small allocation, given the importance of these issues, HNRC's reported reconciliation text provides an investment roadmap to address many of the most apparent impacts of the climate crisis. These critical, relatively inexpensive provisions must remain in the final bill text.

The United States has already begun to feel the climate crisis in every region and every community. Wildfires in the western United States burn year-round, destroying homes, displacing communities, and costing tens of billions of taxpayer dollars in suppression and emergency assistance costs. Moreover, these fires burn amid an unprecedented, decades-long drought that risks leaving communities with limited access to clean drinking water. HNRC's reported bill would invest billions in wildfire and drought mitigation.

This year has seen 18 weather disasters costing at least \$1 billion, and it is only October. Restoring coastal ecosystems can help reduce the impact of powerful storms. For example, coastal wetlands prevented more than \$625 million in direct property damages during Hurricane Sandy, reducing damages by an average of 22% in over half the affected areas.¹

In addition, the Gulf Coast and the mid-Atlantic are experiencing the fastest rates of sea-level rise in the United States. Damage from these rising waters is exacerbated by climate-driven storms, with the worst impacts concentrated in communities of color, many of which have the fewest resources to respond to and recover from these damaging events. HNRC's reported bill would invest in sea-level rise mitigation and resilient coastal communities.

The toll of these climate impacts continues to climb – a toll measured in American lives, livelihoods, and taxpayer dollars. Yet, despite these rising costs and incontrovertible scientific evidence about the climate impact of carbon emissions, the United States remains in the fossil fuel business. The burning of fossil fuels extracted from federal lands² accounts for about a quarter of America's annual carbon pollution. In 2019, federal lands produced roughly 13 percent of U.S. gas, 23 percent of U.S. oil, and 41 percent of U.S. coal. HNRC's reported bill would help us take the first step toward getting out of the fossil fuel business, modernize fossil fuel production from federal lands, and mitigate environmental damages while ensuring a fair return to taxpayers.

This nation has an obligation to invest in mitigation and sequestration, starting with proven, nature-based solutions. Restoring wetlands and blue carbon ecosystems, supporting forest regeneration, and reestablishing climate-resilient ecosystems could contribute 37 percent of reductions needed by 2037, and roughly 20 percent by 2050 to keep global warming below 2°C.³ That potential is part of why the United Nations proposed a decade-long effort to restore nature on behalf of communities and the climate in the wake of their alarming reports on the future impacts of climate change.⁴ It is also why the HNRC reported bill would invest in programs at the Departments of the Interior and Commerce for restoration and sequestration activities across the United States.

While investments in clean energy promise a brighter future for communities across the country, not all communities meet that future on equal footing. Our shared commitment to seeking environmental justice, embodied in the Environmental Justice for All Act and the Justice40 Initiative, cannot be honored without significant investment in those communities and people already bearing the burden of our fossil fuel addiction.

I understand there are pressures to reduce the overall cost of the Build Back Better bill. There is no question investing in clean energy and transportation is essential to addressing the climate

¹ Narayan, S., Beck, M.W., Wilson, P. *et al.* The Value of Coastal Wetlands for Flood Damage Reduction in the Northeastern USA. *Sci Rep* 7, 9463 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-017-09269-z>

² Including interests in lands.

³ Bronson W. Griscom *et. al.*, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences Oct 2017, 114 (44) 11645-11650; DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1710465114

⁴ <https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/>

crisis. However, given the scope of this crisis, we must craft a comprehensive climate solution that mitigates carbon pollution and reduces the impacts of climate change through the Build Back Better plan. There is simply too much at stake to leave proven tools on the table. Therefore, I respectfully ask you to ensure the abovementioned provisions from HNRC are funded in the final reconciliation measure.

Thank you for your consideration and your continuing leadership on this issue. I am happy to answer any questions you may have about these provisions, and I stand ready to assist you in your efforts to ensure we can Build Back Better.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Raúl M. Grijalva". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Raúl" being the most prominent part.

Raúl M. Grijalva
Chair
Committee on Natural Resources

Cc: Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Schumer, Secretary Haaland, Ron Klain, Steve Ricchetti, Brian Deese, Gina McCarthy, Ali Zaidi, and David Hayes