Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 11, 2012

President Barack Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We commend you for the bold commitment to addressing the threat of climate change you made in your inaugural address, and stand ready and willing to help you advance this goal. As part of this commitment, we urge you appoint a bipartisan blue ribbon panel to develop a comprehensive program to help local communities prepare for the anticipated impacts of an increase in climate-related extreme weather events.

As you know, recent extreme weather events like Hurricane Sandy, severe droughts, and wildfires have demonstrated the very real and urgent threat climate change poses to our communities and nations. The 2013 National Climate Assessment draft noted that "Climate change is already affecting the American people. Certain types of weather events have become more frequent and/or intense, including heat waves, heavy downpours, and, in some regions, floods and droughts. … These changes are part of the pattern of global climate change, which is primarily driven by human activity."[1]

We must protect our communities from the potentially devastating impacts on both lives and livelihoods caused by climate related extreme weather. For example, Hurricane Sandy was an extraordinary storm that wreaked havoc across the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. However, it was only one of 25 deadly and destructive floods, droughts, heat waves, storms and wildfires in the last two years that each caused at least $1 billion in damages. These extreme weather events led to 1,113 fatalities and up to $180 billion in economic damages nationwide.[2]

Scientists predict that extreme weather events will grow in frequency and/or ferocity over the coming years, particularly if unchecked climate pollution continues. For instance, the National Climate Assessment draft explains that "sea level rise, combined with coastal storms, has increased the risk of erosion, storm-surge damage, and flooding for coastal communities."[3] These events will have high human and economic costs, particularly on middle and lower income households.[4]

Fortunately, many of the communities that are most vulnerable to extreme weather are working with local stakeholders to develop and implement plans to reduce the potential impact of extreme weather on homes, businesses, electricity, water systems, and other essential infrastructure. Every dollar of investment in community resilience or mitigation returns $4 in economic benefit, according to the Multihazard Mitigation Council.[5] Nonetheless, it is difficult for many communities to make such

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[1] http://ncadac.globalchange.gov/download/NCAJan11-2013-publicreviewdraft-chap1-execsum.pdf (page 1)
[2] http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/events (years 2012, 2011)
[3] http://ncadac.globalchange.gov/download/NCAJan11-2013-publicreviewdraft-chap1-execsum.pdf (page 4)
[4] http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/green/report/2012/11/16/45135/heavy-weather-how-climate-destruction-harms-middle-and-lower-income-americans/
[5] http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.nibs.org/resource/resmgr/MMC/hms_vol1.pdf (page iii)

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investments because of dramatic budget reductions in recent years. While local communities must ultimately make the decisions that are best for their respective communities, the significant public benefit and high cost of these projects create a compelling interest for the federal government to assist these communities with these resilience efforts.

We urge you to appoint a bipartisan blue ribbon panel to develop a comprehensive plan to help local communities prepare for the anticipated impacts of increased climate-related extreme weather. Within six months, the blue ribbon panel should:

- Determine total federal expenditures on disaster relief and recovery over the past five years, broken down by disaster and project type;
- Estimate the financial support necessary for communities to develop and implement plans to increase their resilience to floods, severe storms, droughts, heat waves, sea level rise, wildfires, and day-to-day economic impacts;
- Identify federal programs that already provide funding for resilience efforts;
- Recommend a dependable revenue stream to provide additional resources for local pre-disaster mitigation planning; and
- Establish eligibility criteria for applications for this revenue.

The panel's membership should include people who led recovery efforts from recent weather tragedies, including governors, mayors, first responders, and business and civic leaders. After an opportunity for public comment, the blue ribbon panel should forward its recommendations to you and Congress for action.

Since we cannot prevent extreme weather events from happening in the future, we must take action now to safeguard our communities from their devastation. Assessing current efforts and developing comprehensive strategies will provide an important guide for these actions, which will save lives as well as reduce the tens billions of dollars spent on disaster relief and recovery.

Again, we thank you for your commitment to addressing climate change and stand ready and willing to help you advance this goal. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lois Capps

Frank Pallone Jr.

Henry A. Waxman

Sam Farr

David N. Cicilline

Jim Langevin

Earl Blumenauer

Madeleine J. Bordallo

John P. Sarbanes

Donna F. Edwards

Louise M. Slaughter

Paul D. Tonko

Steve Cohen

Doris O. Matsui

Eric Swalwell

Lucille Roybal-Allard

Carolyn McCarthy

Bill Pascrell Jr.

Carolyn B. Maloney

Barbara Lee

Jim Moran

Alan H. Lowenthal

Eliot L. Engel

Edward J. Markey

Jerrold Nadler

Michael M. Honda

Eleanor Holmes Norton

Raúl M. Grijalva

Rush Holt

Joe Garcia

Rep. Lois Capps
Rep. Henry Waxman

Rep. David N. Cicilline
Rep. Earl Blumenauer
Rep. John P. Sarbanes
Rep. Louise M. Slaughter
Rep. Steve Cohen
Rep. Emanuel Cleaver
Rep. Carolyn McCarthy
Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney
Rep. Jim Moran
Rep. Eliot L. Engel
Rep. Jared Huffman
Rep. Chellie Pingree
Rep. Rush Holt

Rep. William R. Keating
Rep. Suzanne Bonamici
Rep. Jerrold Nadler
Rep. Chaka Fattah
Rep. Charles B. Rangel

Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr.
Rep. Sam Farr

Rep. Jim Langevin
Rep. Madeleine Z. Bordallo
Rep. Donna F. Edwards
Rep. Paul Tonko
Rep. Doris O. Matsui
Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard
Rep. Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Rep. Barbara Lee
Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton??
Rep. Edward J. Markey
Rep. Michael M. Honda
Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva
Rep. Joe Garcia

Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Rep. Carol Shea-Porter
Rep. David Price
Rep. Peter Welch
Rep. Gerald Connolly